

Gender Studies

Terms and Debates

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challenge to the ways in which femininity and masculinity are signified through/by the bodies of individuals in our society.

Chapter 5 engages with the issue of embodiment, which has been such an important focus of recent critical writing. In Chapter 1 we talked about the split between mind and body which has been fundamental to Western thought. In this chapter we discuss recent critical work which has established the consequences for our gendering practices of that split. We also visit a number of sites at which notions of embodiment are now being explored, including the institutions of medicine, the law and fashion.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we consider ways in which the social fabric is woven into the gendered ways we live our lives by looking closely at the intersection between the social, the public and the private – a crucial nexus for gender studies. We discuss how we live and 'do' gender in light of these connections by focusing on the context of everyday lives. Reference is made to the specific sites of the workplace and home life, and activities such as using space, and the negotiation of gender duality particularly by young children.

Some issues recur in a number of chapters and this enables us to present them from several different perspectives, and to show how different theories can engage at the one site. We hope that reading this book will engage you in the discussions and debates we set out.

Overall, *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates* is an attempt to introduce the theories used in the discussion of gender as a concept as well as of the media and modes by which gender is part of our lives and of ourselves as subjects. We relate these theories to the everyday situations in which we encounter gendering practices, focusing quite specifically on the ways in which we read and see gender in the world around – and within – us. Our aim is to provide you with some tools with which to think about gender, to understand some of the complex theoretical materials written about gender, and to locate the practices of gendering in your everyday lives.

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Ways of Talking

There are a number of terms that people use when they talk about gender. Many of these, such as 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual', seem self-evident and we tend to think that such terms have always existed. It's often surprising to discover that many of the terms we take for granted are relatively new, coined only in the nineteenth century. Somehow their Greek etymology (heterosexual using the Greek *heteros* meaning 'other, different'; homosexual using the Greek *homos* meaning 'same as') makes them seem much older. In this chapter, we explore many of the terms which recur in our discussions of gender and sexuality, to discover what their actual history is and how this history reflects and shapes attitudes and values. We also begin to look at how subjectivity is formed, and provide some of the initial terms that you will need to navigate through the complex terrain of the various hypotheses on what processes govern the formation of the self. To think about gender is to think about the self, or the subject, in formation. Let us start with the most obvious term: gender.

Gender

Gender divides humans into two categories: male and female. It is a system which organises virtually every realm of our lives; whether we are sleeping, eating, watching TV, shopping or reading, gender is at work. Yet because it is everywhere, it is sometimes difficult to see it in operation. Imagine trying to escape the division of gender in our daily lives – without the birth certificate which records our gender, we could not get a passport, or driver's licence (which also record our gender). But say we had managed to get by without paperwork. Every trip to a public toilet would demand that we declare our gender by which door we choose. Every human body in modern societies is assigned a place in a binary structure of gender.

Not only does the system of gender divide the human race into two categories, it privileges the male over the female. Gender operates as a set of hier-

the equation positive and the feminine negative. We can trace this way of dividing up the world as far back as the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in Western European history (see Synnott 1993). In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle summarises what he calls the Pythagorean table of opposites and it shows clearly how these divisions work. On the one side are terms such as Limit, Odd, One, Right, Male, Resting, Straight, Light, Good, Square; on the other side, Unlimited, Even, Plurality, Left, Female, Moving, Curved, Darkness, Bad, Oblong (Aristotle 1968–69). Aristotle sets one series of nouns against another, sorting them into opposites, where the obviously opposite pairs reinforce the oppositionality of the merely different pairs (male is to female as an oblong is opposite to a square?). Aristotle took his curious set of binary oppositions even further in his *Economics* where he states that men were stronger, women weaker; men courageous, women cautious; men the outdoors type, women domestic; men educate children, women nurture them (Aristotle 1968–69). An examination of TV ads shows that ancient Greek philosophy continues to have its influence centuries later. Beer commercials show men shooting dangerous rapids, while women are pictured elsewhere decorating the home. Even our language is gendered: nouns which are feminine in English (as in many other languages) more often than not have negative connotations. A buddy (a word derived from brother) is a good thing to have, but no one wants to be a sissy (derived from sister).

This binary division of gender can take several forms. The two halves can be seen to be equal but opposite, in a complementary relationship, as in the Yang/Yin symbol of Chinese philosophy. However, often the two halves will be typified as opposite and with the female in the inferior position. An example of this can be found in the nineteenth-century work of Paul Broca, who weighed male brains against female ones, and came up with some rather dubious conclusions about male superiority based on his findings. Another formulation of the binary division has it that the two halves are opposite and the female is naturally superior. The pioneer of education, Maria Montessori, held opinions which would exemplify this view: she saw women's superiority in their guardianship of human morality, affectivity and honour (for a longer discussion of the binary division and more examples, see Synnott 1993). We have here several ways of configuring the relationship between the two sides of gender (equal but opposite; opposite but female-negative; opposite but female-positive; and so on), but while these formulations might reflect different political agendas, and different ways of understanding the world, they all share the view that human gender is binary, is made up of two halves, which each define the other. The male side of the equation is generally coded as the positive one, and so becomes the standard by which all others are judged; in effect it becomes the norm. This privileging of the masculine is generally the case in Western societies.

relation to sex: gender as the cultural or social construction of sex. As a sociological or anthropological category, gender is not simply the gender one is, that is, a man or a woman, but rather a set of meanings that sexes assume in particular societies. The operation of gender in our society takes up these sets of meanings, organises them as masculinity or femininity, and matches or lines them up with male and female bodies. Received opinion about gender would have it that a female body produces feminine behaviours, a feminine identity. Cross-cultural research from anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1949) has often been used by feminists to show that if sex is a biological given, gender is a social construct (see also section on 'Sex'). This research has also made clear that a particular behaviour which is coded as masculine in one society may be coded feminine in another. A man holding hands with another man in public is interpreted as feminine behaviour in many Western nations. In countries in the Middle East, however, this activity would be coded as acceptable masculine behaviour. Moreover, in the nineteenth century in England, a man would often stroll arm in arm with another male friend without this being coded as effeminate. This allows us to consider the historical and cross-cultural constructedness of femininity and masculinity, of gender itself.

Many socialist feminists and theorists such as Christine Delphy (1984) maintain that sex roles became part of our bodies, not because they expressed masculinity or femininity, but because of a hierarchical division of labour which initiated the elaboration of hierarchies. For Delphy, gender came into being to reinforce an already existing dichotomy between workers and owners. For some theorists, gender and sex are overlapping constructs that differ in emphasis, where our understanding of biological sex is likely to be shaped by our culture's notion of gender. Other theorists argue that there is no body, no biological sex, outside gender; that in becoming human, one is always already gendered.

Feminist psychoanalysis in particular has looked very closely at this question of where gender begins. How, they ask, does one become a boy or a girl? Looking at two different answers to this question gives us a sense of the debates about the cultural construction of gender, and the two different notions of the 'subject', or the self, and its relation with gender. Is gender acquired in the course of socialisation and the internalisation of norms, or is gender part of a linguistic network that precedes and structures the formation of the ego and the linguistic subject? For the most part, Object relations theory (a school of thought associated with the work of Melanie Klein (1963), and taken up by US feminist psychologists such as Nancy Chodorow (1978a, 1978b)) would say that the first possibility is the case; these theorists tend to argue that gender is a set of roles and cultural meanings acquired in the course of ego formation within family structures, and that significant changes in child-rearing practices and kinship organisation can alter the meaning of

Woman (Chodorow 1978b).

For Freudian-derived French Lacanian psychoanalysis, the second answer is the attractive one. Theorists reworking this Lacanian tradition tend to refer to sexual difference not gender; using this term sexual difference reflects their conviction that in order to become speaking subjects, we must be sexed. Sexual difference is a process, rather than something which is acquired. Whereas other theorists of gender presume a subject who takes on a gender in the course of its development, the Lacanian view insists that the subject itself is formed through a subjection to sexual difference. So these two schools show us two possibilities: in one, gender appears to be a cultural determination that a pre-existing subject acquires; in the other, sexual difference appears to constitute the very matrix which gives rise to the subject itself.

A further explanation for how gender comes to work in society is posited by Judith Butler (1990, 1993). She argues that gender is the process of embodiment which results from the repeated performance of acts of gendering, and that this debate over which comes first, gender or sex, nature or culture, is a red herring.

Gender is one of feminism's most central categories of inquiry, and it intersects with many other social systems (race, sexuality) which are also governed by binary opposition. Gender studies pays particular attention to how these markers of difference work to constitute and reinforce individual and social subjectivities.

Gender is the culturally variable elaboration of sex, as a hierarchical pair (where male is coded superior and female inferior).

Sex

While the debate over which comes first, gender or sex, may be a red herring, a discussion of how people have understood what sex is would seem to be crucial to a discussion of gender. We all know what sex is, don't we? It's easy to demonstrate. You point to someone's body to prove they're a man or woman, a boy or a girl. The idea of sex is so naturalised that it is hard to see it at work. Of course sex is natural. Men and women fit together, don't they? As only one chromosome out of 46 determines sex, human beings are biologically, or genetically, more similar than we are different. Yet this idea of sex, of a natural biological coupling and equivalence, is part and parcel of the establishment in certain Western cultures of a battle of the sexes, of a binary opposition, which makes this distinction and mutual exclusiveness between men and women appear natural.

ness. We believe that proof of the existence of two sexes is on the body, in the body; it is the body. Yet biologists are not necessarily uninfluenced by their own cultural beliefs about what is natural. The anatomist Herophilus of Alexandria, who assumed that women were imperfect men, dissected cadavers and found the proof for his theory; he thought he saw testes and seminal ducts connected to the neck of the bladder, using the male body as a template (see Synnott 1993). Of course, what he saw were ovaries and Fallopian tubes, which do not connect to the bladder.

We began with the naturalness of sex, and now move to its binary quality. Common knowledge has it that there are two sexes. How do we know? Administrative forms ask us to tick male or female, doors to public toilets make us choose one or the other, the birth of a new baby is invariably greeted with the question, 'Boy or girl?' Many psychologists, biologists and medical practitioners in particular rely on definitions of sex which refer to a person's biological maleness or femaleness. When, in modern societies, a child is born with ambiguous genitalia, parents are asked to make a difficult decision: which of the two sexes will they choose for the sex of rearing? This decision is framed by medical expertise, made largely on the basis of the reproductive possibilities of the infant or its real genetic sex. In our highly medicalised modern societies, the resolution of ambiguous sex reveals how our bodies are rigorously policed into two sexes – male or female.

Sigmund Freud (1925, 1931, 1933), the 'father of psychoanalysis' who developed his theories quite early in the twentieth century, didn't think that the little boys and girls growing up into proper mothers and fathers was the only possibility (although he did think it was the only sane one). He imagined that this sexual distinction could be upset, and reviewed the possibilities of other developmental trajectories, such as various forms of homosexuality ('inversion') and modes of anatomical hermaphroditism. But in our society it is increasingly difficult to think outside the frame of male and masculine, female and feminine.

What then is the relationship between gender and sex? There have been quite important and consequential formulations of the distinction between sex and gender, for example, in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1972), 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', and in cultural anthropology where gender does not reflect or express sex as a primary given, but is the effect of social and cultural processes. The 'sex/gender system' is a term feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1974) coined to explain the variable ways that kinship organisations produce gendered beings out of sexed bodies. In 1974, she argued that all societies had a sex/gender system, and that this system produced social conventions on gender from the biological and anatomical raw material of human sex and procreation.

Rubin's essay argues with the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Rubin questions Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the universality of kinship relations. Lévi-Strauss believed that universal structures required every human to submit to the incest taboo in order to enter into kinship and the cultural status of the human subject. Only through subjecting incestuous impulses to this taboo do subjects emerge. In other words, to have the status of a person, to be able to say 'I', everyone must first be positioned within kinship, that is, become a daughter, sister, brother, son. The individual is prohibited from desiring or becoming members of their own kinship group (family or clan) – the incest taboo. So human subjects emerge on the condition that they are first gendered through kinship relations.

Rubin goes on to explain that the law of kinship produces human subjects, by prohibiting not only incest, but also homosexuality; gendered subjects are thus produced through a series of prohibitions which regulate not only sexual behaviour, but sexual desire itself. One is a man to the extent that one does not desire other men, but desires only those women who are substitutes for the mother; one is a woman to the extent that one does not desire other women (the spectre of that desire has been transformed into an identification, into wanting to be like that woman rather than wanting that woman) and desires only those men who are substitutes for the father.

For both Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, it is only through being subjected to this process of heterosexualised gendering that viable or coherent human subjects are produced. So, 'one' is not a one, that is, a speaking, human subject, except through subjection to this heterosexual imperative.

For Lacanian-based feminist psychoanalysis, this doesn't quite measure up. If feminists take Lacan seriously, then gender cannot be said to be the cultural construction of sex, for sex is established through the linguistic effect of sexual difference, and this effect is coextensive with language, and hence, culture as such. The initiation into language is the primary process by which sexual difference is required and constituted. If this scheme is right, gender cannot be overthrown, and the very wish to do so is a fantasy which is inevitably thwarted by the constraints of language itself. Such a view has critical implications for any effort to consider gender as that into which one is socialised, for the 'one' is always already marked by sexual difference; constituted in culture as a sexed being *before* the process called socialisation.

Understanding how the sex/gender system establishes not only the sex of bodies, but also the kinds of desire they can have is very important. The way that some kinship systems make all homosexual practices taboo, and others do not, is important for thinking about the ways in which heterosexuality is made natural by culture. Feminism has argued that these gendered, heterosexual positions are not as stable as some might have us believe. Some feminists think that our unconscious fantasies threaten the stability of the structure, or that these are historically specific ideas about becoming human,

and so may be different in other cultures, and subject to change in the future. Informed by feminist and gay cultural movements, the future of kinship relations could lead to the destabilisation and overthrow of gender itself.

Imagine a world with five sexes, say, lesbian, man, hermaphrodite, woman and cyborg. This would be a project which would involve reinventing everything which surrounds us, language, architecture, painting, advertising and, most of all, ourselves.

Sex is a theory about human beings which divides them into two biologically based categories – male or female.

Sexuality

What is clear about the definitions and discussions of gender and sex is that ideas about sexuality are so intimately tied up with gender, that it is sometimes difficult to see where one ends and the other begins. To begin with, the hierarchy that privileges the male in dualist systems of gender, also gives the structure for how sexuality works in Western society. Female sexuality is marked as naturally masochistic, narcissistic and passive; male sexuality is inscribed as naturally aggressive, sadistic and active. Traditional notions of women's sexuality make it virtually synonymous with her reproductive function. Motherhood is seen as the natural expression of female sexuality. The myth of the vaginal orgasm (that is, the belief that an orgasm triggered by vaginal rather than clitoral stimulation is superior and normal for women), for example, is caught up in this notion that pleasure and desire in women will be tied to child-bearing. (This myth is one of Freud's less laudable contributions to thinking on gender and sexuality, and is one reason why his theories have been viewed with some suspicion by feminist theorists.) According to this way of seeing the world, the clitoris, because it has no reproductive function, has no sexual function. And so sex (doing it) is conflated with sex (which public toilet door is chosen).

To give an example of how this affects the working of society we might look at legal cases of personal injury, where injuries to the penis are often amply compensated. Courts in Australia have even considered awarding men who are seriously injured the services of a 'masseuse' to provide for their sexual gratification. For women, if penetration has become difficult due to an accident, some compensation might be awarded. But generally, damage to functions which affect women's sexual pleasure – loss of feeling, touch or difficulty in other associated sexual functions (painful menstruation, for example) – has gone uncompensated. As for lesbians, one wonders how a conservative legal

court would deal with pleasure without penile penetration ... 'Well, if they don't really do it, then how can compensation be awarded?' In this way, legal decisions reveal how deeply entrenched is the idea that normal sexuality be organised around intercourse, around a penis penetrating a vagina.

Feminists have contested the naturalness of this version of (hetero)sexuality just as they have questioned the naturalness of gender roles. They have prised apart the automatic link between dominance and the male, and subordination and the female. They have also argued that the personal is political, that our most personal experiences are shaped by their location within social divisions and histories. This distinction between what can be discussed openly and what should be hidden takes us back to Aristotle's Pythagorean table in the section on gender: men are on the side of the public, women hidden. Now we can identify a real paradox. On the one hand, as we saw with the court cases regarding compensation, a certain kind of male heterosexual desire defines what counts as real sex; on the other hand, women, paradoxically, are 'the sex', they stand in for, they come to represent, sex.

Thus heterosexuality is not just a choice of partners. Its construction through the binary oppositions of gender helps it to produce the hierarchies which systematically organise the oppression of women. For some, this system of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (a term Adrienne Rich (1993a) developed in 1979 which we will soon discuss) is so deeply implicated in women's oppression that real social change will involve challenging this norm. Other feminists have argued that to overturn patriarchal oppression, the link of female sexuality to motherhood must be severed. The demands for women's right to control their own sexuality, to determine whether and when to have children, targeted this system of compulsory heterosexuality. For Shulamith Firestone (1970), the elaboration of new contraceptive devices and the promise of reproductive technologies was that they would uncouple mothering from the female body, and so lead to new sexualities and new configurations of gender roles. For other theorists, lesbian separatism provided an escape route from the patriarchally dominated institutions of sexuality (for example Daly, 1978).

But to change something, we must understand it. How is sexuality constructed? In trying to understand where desire comes from, how sexuality works, a variety of theories have been advanced to explain these (relatively recent and Western) rigid categories of human sexuality. Until the gay liberation movement of the 1970s encouraged gays and lesbians to theorise their own existence, scientists and psychologists generally explained homosexuality and bisexuality as either exceptions to or aberrations from the norm of heterosexuality. Currently, theories on sexuality range from sexual identity to sexual activity, from pathology to preference. At one end of the spectrum, our sexuality could be seen to be a part of an essential us, with a biological basis – genetic and prenatal hormonal factors have determined our sexual

orientation. Here it assumed that sexual orientation is 'set' early in life. We may have tried to repress the 'real (gay/lesbian/male heterosexual/female bisexual) us', but eventually we will no longer be able to deny our true self. This is one way of telling the story, that there is an essential core which is the identity with which we are born and which we will take to the grave. At the other end of the spectrum of sexual orientation is social constructivism: that events or the environment made us who we are (and formed what and who we want). Here the particular development of our sexual orientation is based on social and cultural factors. Under this theory, the overwhelming predominance of heterosexuality in society would be attributed to the compelling social pressures which are exerted on men and women, to the ways in which real men and real women only properly exist within the strictures and structures of heterosexuality, and as part of the natural fit between male and female bodies.

Sexuality is a set of social processes which produce and organise the structure and expression of desire.

The Modern Subject

Several times in the first three sections of this chapter we have used the word 'subject' rather than the word 'individual' or even 'self'. Writers in this field often refer not only to the self, or the individual, but at times to the subject, and subjectivity. Much of the work in this book will consist of suggesting ways to think about how we come to be who we are. We will be analysing what it means to be human. In focusing on gender, sex and sexuality, we are focusing on the subject. For some analysts of what being human involves, gender is a supplemental category – for example the optional extra of air conditioning in an expensive car. For those who think it is a bit more crucial (the wheels? the chassis?), it then becomes important to choose appropriate theories of being human. When we think of our self, our ideas are formulated not only by our original insights into what it means to be, but also in part by what prominent philosophers have speculated about the self over the last few centuries. We will be gradually introducing this concept of the subject and subjectivity and its importance throughout the book, but we start here by discussing what is understood by the word 'individual' and what some of the major differences are between it and the modern subject.

When we speak about the self, we often imagine the individual, someone who knows their own mind, acts on their rational assessments of situations. For example, a friend decides to move cities to take a new job. When we ask

it is one of the few contexts in which 'the man question' or 'the man problem' can be raised. In almost all other social theories, the issue of gender is raised in terms of 'the woman question' or 'the woman problem'.

Recent studies in a wide range of disciplines (sociology, social psychology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, history and cultural studies) have focused on the importance of thinking structurally rather than personally about the issue of gender oppression. Contemporary studies of masculinity have turned their attention to several sites – capitalist work practices, the division of labour, the family, the state, colonialism, empire, rationality, sexuality and culture – as important patriarchal structures. In *Understanding Masculinities*, Martin Mac An Ghail (1996) is concerned to build up a more complex model for understanding masculinity and male domination as cultural and social practices that are part of large-scale social structures and processes. Yet while Connell (1996) points out that 'the main axis of power in the contemporary European/American gender relations' remains 'the overall subordination of women and dominance of men – the structure Women's Liberation named "patriarchy"' (p. 74), the phrases 'male hegemony' or 'hegemonic masculinity' are used by some instead of the term 'patriarchy' in reference to the widespread domination of men in the social, economic and cultural spheres.

Male hegemony or hegemonic masculinity refers to the widespread domination of men in the social, economic and cultural spheres.

The concept of 'hegemony' refers to 'the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life' and is borrowed from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations (Connell 1996, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity consists of the current practices and ways of thinking which authorise, make valid and legitimise the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. This hegemony exists through institutions such as the family, corporate business, government and the military.

Connell uses the phrase 'patriarchal dividend' to refer to the ways in which all men benefit from patriarchal privilege without personally being engaged in direct acts of aggression or oppression of women. There is, he suggests, a widespread 'complicity with the hegemonic project' even among men who are never violent towards women, who do their share of the housework and make extensive compromises with women rather than exercising naked domination or uncontested displays of authority. (This does not mean that violence is not used in the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity; male on female domestic violence is still significantly present.)

David Buchbinder (1994, 1998) suggests that patriarchal social structures are not positive for men either. In addition to the subordination of women, he points

out that in modern Western patriarchal societies there is also 'a differential power relationship among men', with access to power depending on 'physical build, and strength, age, (official) sexual orientation and prowess (even if only rumoured), social class and advantage, economic power, race of the individual, and so on' (1994, p. 34). Throughout their lives, boys and men find themselves under the supervision and surveillance of other males. Under these conditions many men come to feel that they may be publicly humiliated and deprived of their status as men. As a consequence of this, they may strive for 'an excessive masculinity, whether signified by a huge, muscular body, an impressive sexual scorecard', 'a powerful car or a high-flying job', or 'acts of violence toward women and children, and other men, especially gays, as an attempt to assert their masculinity in the eyes of their fellows' (p. 36). This rivalry towards other men, which is also a feature of hegemonic masculinity, leads to men's demands for unequivocal emotional support from women, which in turn leads to domestic violence if the woman is unable or unwilling to give it.

Patriarchy remains a contested term. But whether one speaks of patriarchy or hegemonic masculinity, conceiving of gendered differences in power and authority as structural allows scope to both men and women to work for changes in social policy, for childcare provisions, for flexible working conditions and working hours, and for policies that monitor the abuse of power and violence.

Heterosexuality

Perhaps another of the most prominent institutions in the study of gender is heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is defined in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (SOED) as 'pertaining to or characterized by the normal relations between the sexes'; although the SOED does not specify what normal means. The implication of such a definition is that the meaning of 'normal relations' is so apparent that it needs no definition, and any doubt on the part of the reader is a reflection on the reader her- or himself. Reading the dictionary in the context of contemporary Western society, which privileges heterosexuality in its institutional practices (more on this below), we can deduce that normal relations means men having procreative sex with women and vice versa. The other implication we might make from this definition is that heterosexuality is a universal and transhistorical concept, again because of the use of the term 'normal relations'. The concept of 'normal' closes down any suggestion that understandings might once have been different, or might not even have existed, by its evocation of its opposite abnormal or pathological. If we try to think differently about gender and sexuality, about a time perhaps when the term 'heterosexuality' did not exist, the definition implies that we are outside the realm of normal relations between the sexes.

Heterosexuality, the dictionary tells us, was devised after (that is, following, or in the style of) the term, 'homosexual', which had itself been coined some four years earlier in 1897. So heterosexuality, a term which many might assume to have a long history, which was used to describe relations between the sexes, is in fact quite a new term. The obvious question we might ask after this revelation is 'why?' Why did the English develop a term to describe normal relations between the sexes only in 1901?

The most obvious answer is that the term was developed, as the dictionary indicates, as the obverse of homosexuality. Yet even that explanation begs the question: why did it take so long for these terms to be generated? Was there no flexibility in human sexual relations before this time, so that terms such as 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' were unnecessary? Or, is it the other way around, that there was so much flexibility that such defining and delimiting terms were irrelevant? The unspoken assumption here might be that before this time all human relations were heterosexual. Yet historians and archaeologists among others will tell us that the behaviour defined by the *SOED* as homosexual clearly existed before this time. Perhaps it had taken until the early twentieth century for the normal to be defined?

Another approach might be to ask why the terms 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual' were defined at this time. And here there is an answer: both homosexual and heterosexual were used by Charles Gilbert Chaddock in his 1892 translation of Richard von Krafft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis: A Medico-Forensic Study (SOED)*. This is the representative quote from Krafft-Ebbing given in the *SOED*: 'The object of post-hypnotic suggestion is to remove the impulse to masturbation and homosexual feelings and impulses, and to encourage heterosexual feelings with a sense of virility.' In other words, sexuality (whether heter- or homo-) was perceived not as a way of describing particular acts or behaviours, but as an element of the individual's emotional life and, subsequently, of her or his sense of identity. Furthermore, heterosexual, it appears, is both desirable and manly, in apparent contrast to homosexual. So heterosexual was part of a regime – a medicalised or psychoanalytic regime – whereby sexuality was not only located within the identity of the individual subject (rather than, for example, being located in the sexual act itself), but was also assigned a disciplinary or regulatory function, with one sexuality (hetero-) identified as positive and another (homo-) as negative.

In the early twentieth century, as Gayle Rubin claims, sexuality became 'a vector of oppression' (1992); that is, it became a way of classifying human beings – normal or abnormal, inside society or outside it; acceptable or unacceptable. The theorist whose work has most influenced the contemporary revaluations of sexuality and gender is Michel Foucault. His four-volume work *The History of Sexuality* argues convincingly that sexuality is socially and

historically, rather than biologically, derived. From this perspective, heterosexuality is not a biological state or orientation, but is a socially and historically constructed category which positions some people as good and others as bad. Furthermore, since sexuality is positioned as the critical point of contact between the genders, it is also used to regulate them. The genders male and female are themselves constructed by reference to socially and historically constituted definitions of heterosexuality – the positively coded sexuality. Male behaviour equates with heterosexual, masculine behaviour, female with heterosexual, feminine behaviour.

Gender and heterosexuality can, therefore, be seen as categories which regulate (and create) individual subjects, according to how they are prepared to perform their sexuality. At the same time, their performativity is clearly revealed; these are not categories to be, but to perform, as Judith Butler (1990) argues in her influential book, *Gender Trouble*. This recognition that neither gender nor sex are inherent, biological features but are socially and culturally constructed is fundamental to our current revaluation of 'heterosexuality' as a term which constructs, rather than simply classifies, human sexuality and the gendering of individual subjects.

When Adrienne Rich first used the phrase 'compulsory heterosexuality', it is this coercive power of heterosexuality to which she refers: 'I am suggesting that heterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution*' (1993a, p. 232). Heterosexuality, she argues, is not just an innate biological function or practice, as had been previously assumed. Gayle Rubin refers specifically to this assumption as 'sexual essentialism' which she notes is 'embedded in the folk wisdoms of Western societies, which consider sex to be eternally unchanging, asexual, and transhistorical' (1992, p. 9). When a sexual practice is perceived or constructed as essential, in turn, it then has the power to construct those who do not practice it as aberrant, as non-essential in all senses of the word; that is, not possessing the innate or essential capacity to be viable human beings, and so non-essential to human society. For Rich, then, heterosexuality is rendered compulsory for all who would participate in human society.

The power of compulsory heterosexuality is that for those whose lives conform to its demands, it acts as a constant reinforcement and regulatory mechanism, producing its compliant readers as viable social subjects and regulating any thoughts they might have about alternative gender roles or sexual choices. For those who do not conform to its demands, on the other hand, compulsory heterosexuality acts as a mechanism of exclusion and oppression, because it consistently constructs them as outsiders, aberrant and bad.

The term 'heterosexist' is used to describe a society in which heterosexual operates as a defining and regulating principle. The negative connotations of the term refer to the proscriptive function of (compulsory) heterosexuality.

Heterosexism describes social or personal structures which are defined and regulated by exclusive and compulsory heterosexuality.

To be heterosexual is to assume that every person and every practice is heterosexual and, by implication, to suppress or silence all who are not heterosexual, and devalue every practice which is not heterosexual. Another term used to describe this assumption of heterosexuality is 'heteronormative'. The value of this alternative term is that it captures the coercive power of this assumption – its normative or regulatory power.

So heterosexuality is a powerful conceptual tool or category which has been mobilised in the twentieth century to define and regulate not just sexual behaviours, but the ways in which we define gender. As a result it plays a critical role in determining who is regarded as an acceptable social subject. For this reason Judith Butler uses the phrase 'heterosexual matrix' to refer to heterosexuality: 'to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized' (1990, p. 151).

Judith Butler's phrase 'heterosexual matrix' refers to a grid or frame through which cultures make sense of the ways that our bodies, genders and desires seem to appear naturally heterosexual.

Butler's term captures the power of heterosexuality to make particular practices and behaviours seem natural and others unnatural, and it also identifies this term as cultural or social, not biological. Butler also acknowledges the work of Monique Wittig (1992), who uses a similar term, 'heterosexual contract', to capture the regulatory function of the term 'heterosexuality'.

So heterosexuality is a concept, used to delineate, and so regulate, the nature of contemporary sexual relations. It is not simply a biological category, as often assumed; indeed biology developed for many years as a scientific study without the use of this term. Instead it is a social construct which has the power to regulate and (re)inforce not only particular kinds of sexual practice, but also the gender categories based on them. Heterosexuality is the concept which determines whether a man is recognised as a viable male subject and a woman as a viable female subject.

Homosexual

As noted above, homosexual, meaning 'having a sexual propensity for person's of one's own sex' (SOED), came into general usage following the

1892 translation of Krafft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Some earlier usages have been recorded: Swiss doctor Karoly Maria Benkert used the term 'homosexual' in a response to German anti-homosexual legislation in 1869 to describe an 'inborn, and therefore irrepressible, drive' (Plummer 1981, p. 142). Foucault also records the use of the term in an 1870 paper, *Archiv für Neurologie*, by Carl Westphal to describe 'less ... a type of sexual relations than ... a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself' (1981, p. 43). However, the 1890s marks the general adoption of the term by writers such as essayist J.A. Symonds and theorist Havelock Ellis. Like Benkert, all these theorists were involved in a debate about whether desires and behaviours described by the term 'homosexual' were innate or culturally acquired.

Writing about this debate, Foucault notes:

The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology; with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. (1981, p. 43)

Listing these attributes Foucault alludes to the various kinds of study of the homosexual undertaken in the nineteenth century: biographical (a personage), historical and archaeological (a past), medical (a case history), psychological (a childhood), anthropological (a type of life), biological (a life form), psycho-analytic/medical (a morphology), moral (an indiscreet anatomy) and forensic (a mysterious physiology). Foucault's point is not that homosexuality was first discovered or observed in the nineteenth century, but rather that, in the nineteenth century, sexuality and, particularly, aberrant sexuality, 'was implanted in bodies, slipped in beneath modes of conduct, made into a principle of classification and intelligibility, established as a *raison d'être* and a natural order of disorder' (1981, p. 44). In other words, Foucault sees the classification of homosexuality as part of the development of a regime of power which operates by means of its sexual classification of individuals. To accomplish that classification, this regime must first create those individuals, those identities – the homosexual, the heterosexual, the perverse of various kinds – and the structures of pleasure, histories, biologies, moralities, personalities and psychologies which characterise them.

Before the nineteenth century, we might argue, various kinds of sexual act were performed; they were not necessarily used to classify the individual who performed them. During and after the nineteenth century, however, sexuality was inscribed in the individual as a function of her or his sexual practice. Further, all sexualities were not considered equal. The SOED definition of homosexuality (above) seems relatively non-judgmental, but the textual examples it provides of the use of the term suggest otherwise: 'he had been free from homo-sexual inclinations' *Psychopathia Sexualis*. If we substi-

tule heterosexual for homo-sexual, it is clear, by contrast, that this statement is a negative reference to homosexuality.

The debate around the use of the term 'homosexual' in the nineteenth century was stimulated by the proposal and passing of laws against acts associated with homosexual men. As historians of sexuality such as Jeffrey Weeks (1977) have argued, before this time there were laws against acts such as sodomy, but little distinction was made between sodomy between man and man, man and woman, man and beast. However, in 1885 in England the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Act effectively outlawed all forms of homosexual male sexual activity. Following the passing of this Amendment, a number of scandals and trials followed, most famous of which was the prosecution of Oscar Wilde.

It must be noted that there is a causal relation between the scandal and the legal definition; that is, the legal act itself can be seen as having created the scandal by creating the conditions for it to happen.

The Wilde trial and associated debate revealed a great deal of indeterminacy about the meaning of homosexual, stemming in part from the basic issue of whether homosexuality was regarded as innate or learned behaviour. Yet in posing the question in that format, the debaters assumed that sexuality was somehow already innate. It was not that heterosexuality and homosexuality were both seen as possibly learned or culturally produced, but rather that homosexuality might be some sort of culturally produced perversion or inversion of 'normal' heterosexuality. The terms 'inversion' and 'invert' also became popular in the nineteenth century, to describe same-sex behaviours and individuals who engage in same-sex sexual activities. The negative construction of homosexuality at this time is evident in the use of these terms; further, its legal realisation was primarily masculine.

'Inversion' and 'invert' are popular nineteenth-century terms to describe same-sex behaviours and individuals who engage in same-sex sexual activities.

The acts outlawed by the Laboucherie Amendment are specifically masculine (for example sodomy, oral sex between men). Weeks (1977) records that the major sanction on sexuality before the nineteenth century was directed against 'non-purposive' or non-procreative sex; the inspiration being Judeo-Christian ethics which claimed that sex was meant for procreation. Following from the same ethical base, male sexuality was targeted by these sanctions, with lesbianism virtually escaping any legal sanction whatsoever. The reason for this seems to be that women's role in procreation was not recognised in Judeo-Christian ethics as active; women were merely receptacles for the

male sperm which were the source of procreation. Lesbians, according to this view, could not be charged with interfering sexually with procreation. The focus on masculinity in the new laws seems to derive not only from the Judeo-Christian ethic of the past but from a model of male sexuality as undifferentiated and uncontrollable. From Foucault's perspective, we might here recognise a legal construction or production of male sexuality, which can then be used to regulate and discipline male behaviours.

The reasons for the development of this model have been related to concerns about the stability of the family, required for the maintenance of bourgeois society, although a single explanation for such a complex phenomenon is unlikely to be completely sufficient. The Wilde trial, for example, has been seen as a rejection of Wilde's anti-bourgeois behaviour – his flamboyance and overt rejection of bourgeois society – rather than simply (or only) of his sexuality (Marshall 1993), although his homosexuality became emblematic of what was seen as his corrupting influence. The question remains whether that corruption was primarily sexual or social; was Wilde's crime to be homosexual or was it to be an intelligent, socially critical, anti-bourgeois Irishman?

For the history of homosexual as a term and an identity, this question is important because it signifies its social and cultural derivation and use. It was not clear at the end of the nineteenth century whether homosexuality was to be considered natural or cultural; after all, how did one classify homosexual acts performed by otherwise apparently heterosexual people? As Foucault noted (1986, 1988), the various domains of knowledge which characterised nineteenth-century society – for example law, medicine, psychology, anthropology, biology and ethics – were all involved in the production of rules of viable sexual conduct. 'Homosexual' had a role in the production of sexual identities and behaviours which might be used to regulate and discipline members of society. Paradoxically perhaps, while that identity was negative, it nevertheless enabled self-recognition among those who felt excluded by or outside the evolving definitions of 'normal' (hetero-)sexuality; in other words, it was also the genesis of homosexual liberation movements (see below).

Homosexuality

While it may seem redundant at this point to deal separately with homosexuality, it is important to note the genesis of homosexuality as a concept and the great variety of sexual behaviours and identities to which it originally referred. As the discussion above indicates, debates about homosexuality focused on the status of identities which could not be defined by a normative concept of heterosexuality. Terms such as 'invert' and 'pervert' evolved to differentiate between those who might be seen as innately non-heterosexual (invert) and those who choose to engage in behaviours which are outside the

parameters of normal (normative) heterosexuality (pervert). Both terms were negative, however, and their functionality eventually called into question even by those who would police sexual behaviours (after all, how was it possible to tell one from the other?). The point here is that homosexuality as a concept was so broad that it was not only of dubious value in a variety of fields (medical, psychological, judicial), but it also lumped together a range of behaviours which have no necessary relationship, for example homosexuality, transvestism, transsexualism, bisexuality and paedophilia.

The most disturbing correlation of sexual behaviours in our contemporary society is homosexuality and paedophilia. It is striking that in a society in which child sexual abuse is overwhelmingly heterosexual (predominantly committed by men on girls), the focus of so much moral panic is abuse by men on boys, which is then sometimes identified as homosexual. On the same grounds, heterosexuality would have to be identified as fundamentally paedophilic, with homosexuality a pale copy. This conflation of homosexuality and paedophilia has also been related to the nature/nurture argument surrounding homosexuality. If homosexuality is constructed as a learned behaviour *unlike heterosexuality*, then perhaps it can be taught to young people by older people. As the discussion of compulsory heterosexuality above indicates, having learned homosexuality, those young people will then be unable to take their place as acceptably gendered social subjects. This kind of argument has been associated with the reviling of homosexuality as corruption, which can be found in many discussions, and played a major role in the Wilde trial. The metaphorical production of homosexuality as an infectious virus (still evoked around the material reality of the AIDS virus) followed. This is not to devalue the concern with paedophilia, but rather to identify what has been, and continues to be, an ongoing issue in definitions of homosexuality; that the breadth of the term and its imprecision contribute to the negative connotations it still has in many contexts.

Moreover, from a Foucauldian perspective, we might argue that its imprecision and breadth have granted the term a wide efficacy in regulating the behaviours of anyone who strays in any way from the heterosexual norm. That is, if the connotations of the term 'homosexual' are so negative, then it was all the more useful as a threat. This is the kind of threat identified by the term 'homophobia'.

Homophobia is often taken to mean a negative view of or bias against homosexuality, and specifically against people who are identified as homosexual. Often homophobia is experienced in exactly that way, however, in view of the arguments above, we might consider a slightly different understanding of it. Given the role of heterosexuality in producing the accepted versions of masculinity and femininity, so allowing men and women to identify as male and female subjects, any threat to heterosexual identity can be read as a threat to not only an individual's sexuality but also to their

gendering, and so to their status as viable or acceptable social subjects. Homophobia can then be seen not only as a hatred of homosexual subjects, but also as a disciplinary strategy employed against *all* social subjects.

G.K. Lehne wrote in his study of masculinity that 'homophobia is a threat used by homosexual individuals to enforce social conformity in the male role, and maintain social conformity' (Lehne, in Marshall, 1993, p. 154). In this formulation, homosexual refers specifically to anti-homosexual attitudes and homophobia to the threat to transfer the negative connotations of homosexuality to any individual/man who refuses to conform to compulsory heterosexuality (as interpreted by the homosexual).

Homophobia is not only a hatred of homosexual subjects, but also a disciplinary strategy employed against *all* social subjects to ensure that they comply with society's preference for heterosexuality.

Conformity, therefore, means not just the refusal of same-sex sexuality, but an embrace of the (sexual) masculinity and (gendered) maleness sanctioned by heterosexuality; in other words, conformity to the abuser's conception of maleness, which is quite likely to be a patriarchal masculine stereotype (see Chapter 4). Lehne (in Marshall 1993, p. 154) notes that homophobia is used 'against the 49% of the population which is male', not primarily against homosexuals, because its function is to enforce 'certain types of male behaviour and to define the limits of "acceptable" masculinity'. Homophobia depends for its effect on the negative construction of homosexuality and the maintenance of heterosexuality as a guarantor of acceptable gendering. So Lehne notes that homophobia is mobilised consistently against *all* men as a mechanism of social/sexual control.

Homophobia is also experienced by homosexual women or lesbians (see the section entitled 'Lesbian') as a more or less explicit construction of them as outside normal femininity – as unwomanly – and so as unacceptable female subjects. Anti-lesbian homophobia receives less attention in the press and public forums because it seems less often to result in overt violence against lesbians, and its deployment as a threat against heterosexual women is also less overt. Lehne (in Marshall 1993, p. 154) notes that the taunt, 'What are you, a fag [or pansy or poofter and so on]?' is commonly used as a disciplinary mechanism with men. Among women the gendering is sometimes less overt, for example it may refer to a woman's inability to get or keep – or even want – a male partner, or it may be directed at a childless woman. Essentially, however, the threat – of exclusion from correct gendering – is the same and it proceeds from the same homophobic premise.

Lesbian

One of the terms used to describe women who are perceived in heterosexist culture as not correctly gendered is 'lesbian'. While the word has an older use as the adjective derived from the name of the Greek island of Lesbos, its use in the context of gender and sexuality is relatively recent. The *SOED* gives as its secondary meaning 'lesbian vice, sapphism' and records its first use as 1908. The term 'sapphism' is defined in the *SOED* as 'unnatural sexual relations between women' and is traced to 'the name of *Sappho* (see SAPPHIC), who was accused of this vice'; the dictionary records its first use as 1890. The value judgements implicit in the use of terms such as 'unnatural' and 'vice' are quite clear. When used pejoratively (and its definition suggests that it is implicitly pejorative), lesbian does not simply refer to sexual difference or homosexual specificity; it is used to attack the woman's womanliness – her gendering as a viable social subject. A woman who is a lesbian is, under this (heterosexist) regime, not a woman.

While there are now many projects devoted to reconstructing lesbian history and identity, it is also the case that the contemporary heterosexist conception of lesbian is relatively recent. As the discussions of homosexual and homosexuality (above) indicate, contemporary understandings of gender, sex and sexuality can be traced to the nineteenth century and the production of a heterosexual discourse which pathologises non-heterosexuals. Nineteenth-century writings about lesbians tended to favour the term 'invert' (see above), which continued to be popular well into the twentieth century: for example, it is the term used by Radclyffe Hall in *The Well of Loneliness* (1928, first published 1928) to describe the sexuality of her protagonist, Stephen Gordon. However, as noted above, invert carries the negative connotations reflected in its more usual, everyday meaning: to turn upside down. An invert, then, is one in whom the normal is turned upside down – a definition which conserves, rather than challenges, the social practice of heterosexuality. That is, by representing inverts as having upside down sexuality, the term 'invert' preserves the idea that heterosexuality is the norm from which non-heterosexuals stray, by choice or (un)natural inclination.

The Well of Loneliness, Hall's anguished examination of lesbian life, continues to be a very popular novel; it was recently reissued in a new edition by Virago Press. In view of the public censure against homosexuality, this seems rather surprising and it speaks to the ambiguities within which lesbianism operates. On the one hand, it might be argued that lesbians have never suffered the same degree of overt persecution as homosexual men, who are also ungendered by heterosexism. The instances of legal persecution of lesbians as lesbians seem to be confined to situations in which women masqueraded as men, committed sexual misdemeanours as men (for example using a substitute penis), or somehow gained benefits as if they were men (for

example pensions). In other words, the sexual behaviour of lesbians seems not to be an issue in a heterosexual order which defines sexuality in terms of male sexual performance. On the other hand, it may be that the persecution of lesbians is more covert, that it is implicit in the culture of heterosexism. Without arguing a parallel, we might suggest that it would be naive to think that in a white supremacist society, a black person can only be seen as persecuted if or when legal sanctions are used against them. Instead we have to recognise that discrimination and harassment often takes place at an almost subliminal level – through what people say or don't say, through assumptions made and by various behaviours. Lesbians experience covert discrimination of this kind, as well as institutional discrimination in a whole range of areas, including banking, credit, adoption, child custody, travel allowance, immigration, health care, insurance, wills and taxation. So, on these grounds alone, it seems invalid to do as many studies have done, which is to regard lesbians as just like homosexual men, except that they are women (Faraday 1981).

In her analysis of social science research about lesbians, Annabel Faraday criticises the assumption that lesbians and gay men share certain characteristics because of their same-sex relationships:

What is *not* recognized is that while both lesbians and gay men are not 'heterosexual', heterosexuality itself is a power relationship of men over women; what gay men and lesbians are rejecting are essentially polar experiences. (1981, p. 113)

From this perspective, lesbians commit the unforgivable crime of not being attracted by and to men as both sexual partners and the locus of power and authority, whereas homosexual men do, at least, appreciate the appeal of the masculine. Along with writers such as Rich and Wittig, Faraday argues for the specificity of lesbian experience; that is, that it must be seen as an experience specific to women.

Adrienne Rich, in her well-known essay, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' (1993a), makes the same point that to 'equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to erase female reality once again' (p. 239). Rich uses a number of terms in this essay to describe lesbian and/or female reality, which have had a continuing influence on attempts to (re)conceptualise lesbian experience. For example, the term 'lesbian existence' is used to describe both 'the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence' (p. 239). In other words, Rich acknowledges that lesbian is a term in a contemporary debate about female existence, for which she also provides a historical trajectory not determined or limited by heterosexual assumptions. Another term, 'lesbian continuum', is used to describe a range of what Rich terms 'woman-identified experience', which may or may not include sexual experience with another woman. The notion of the lesbian continuum is a controversial one in both

lesbian and heterosexual communities. For conservative, heterosexual women, it suggests a sexualisation of their female friendships which is threatening and disruptive; for some lesbians it suppresses the specificity of their non-heterosexual experience and sexuality. However, it may be that both lesbian continuum and woman-identified experience derive their power and value as much from their rejection of heterosexual constructions of femininity as from their description of particular female friendships or experiences.

A common heterosexual characterisation of women is that they are engaged in an ongoing war among themselves over men. So women are seen as incapable of sustained friendships, gossiping about each other and being generally nasty to each other, especially when men are around. Novels such as Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1977) explored this construction in some detail, noting its disastrous effects on women who were thereby silenced and prevented from forming mutually supportive groups and communities. The counterstrategy of many feminists in the 1960s and 70s was to encourage women to share their experience of heterosexual society, including their relationships with men, in order to provide a supportive environment in which to explore the nature of contemporary society. Rich's ideas of the lesbian continuum and woman-identified experience continue this interrogation of heterosexuality and its constitution of the feminine.

Rich's essay might also be seen in the context of the 1970 essay, 'The Woman-Identified Woman' (Radicalesbians 1973) in which a group of lesbian feminists, identifying themselves as Radicalesbians, argue that what identifies the lesbian is her rejection of the female role as constituted for her by her society. Subsequently, the term 'woman-identified woman' has been used to refer to a woman whose frame of reference was not that of the heterosexual feminine, but who may or may not be a lesbian. That is, it describes the woman who refuses the stereotypical femininity assigned to women by compulsory heterosexuality – competitive (with other women), gossipy (about other women), nasty (to other women). Conversely, the term 'male-identified woman' is used to refer to women who adopt stereotypical (patriarchal or heterosexual) feminine behaviours.

The use of a term developed by lesbian feminists to describe the experience of both lesbians and women who do not identify as lesbians indicates the social critique implicit in any rejection of stereotypical femininity; both non-stereotypical heterosexual women and lesbians make a socially critical choice to behave as woman-identified. As Rich's lesbian continuum suggests, the experience of heterosexual women and lesbians cannot be separated as clearly as heterosexual discourse claims. This interrelationship reinforces the notion that lesbianism is a specifically female experience, not just a female version of male homosexuality; however, it does not help to explain the specificity of lesbianism.

Acknowledging the work of Rich and others in deconstructing the assumptions of what she calls 'heteropatriarchy', Shane Phelan (1994) writes

that lesbianism is less a state of being than a becoming. As we discussed above in relation to homosexuality and heterosexuality, identities based on a particular conceptualisation of sexual behaviours and relationships are based on an implicit acceptance of the parameters of the definition which constitute one position (heterosexual) as normal and others as aberrant. Although taking pride in one's aberrant positioning may be a form of rebellion (see 'Gay' below), it can also be read as preserving the normal versus aberrant schema (which Rich's continuum, for example, works against). For this reason, Phelan (1994) argues against fixed notions of lesbian identity, which she lesbianism into heterosexuality as its defining opposite. She suggests that an individual 'becomes lesbian or not with the choices one makes' (p. 52), noting that these choices are essentially about recognising the sociocultural specificity of heterosexuality and choosing whether or not to comply with it. She argues for a politics in place of an identity: 'I do not need epistemology to justify my desire, my life, my love. I need politics; I need to build a world that does not require such justifications' (p. 55). Phelan quotes Teresa de Lauretis' description of lesbianism as 'a space of contradictions, in the here and now, that need to be affirmed but not resolved' (p. 56); from affirmation may come the strategic alliances which enable the rigorous interrogation of heterosexuality, but not the resolution which implicitly affirms the position of (heterosexual) normality.

Gay

One such strategic alliance of homosexual men and women in the twentieth century was formulated around the identity, gay. Gay has had a number of meanings and mapping them is an interesting deconstruction of its contemporary usage. Its earliest use is defined as 'full of or disposed to joy' (SOED), describing a particular attitude or temperament. This was also glossed as 'airy, off-hand', not quite so positive a term, and later (in 1802) was also 'applied to women, as a conventional epithet of praise' (SOED). The gendering of the word seems significant here, given the binaristic logic which has characterised thinking about men and women, and about masculinity and femininity. If a term is conventionally applied to women, we might wonder what is its conventional masculine opposite. The trajectory from joyful to airy and off-hand to a conventional feminine epithet is a negative or downward one, from a state suggestive of spiritual exaltation to one of cynicism or moral vacuity to feminine vagary. This seems to accord with another early meaning (from 1637): 'addicted to social pleasures and dissipations' and 'of immoral life' (SOED). So gay carries the apparently contradictory meanings of joyful exaltation, on the one hand, and immorality and sensuality, on the other – along with a gendering which reinforces that contradiction. That is, in a

society and language characterised by the negative definition of the feminine (in contrast to the positive definition of the masculine), a quality associated with the feminine is immediately suspect; if not indicative of spiritual, ethical or intellectual weakness, it will certainly be associated with the physical, and perhaps with the sensual or carnal. It is not surprising to discover, therefore, that in the nineteenth century gay was used to refer to immoral women – prostitutes and other fallen women. So the other secondary meanings of gay such as 'bright or lively looking', 'showily dressed' and 'brilliant, attractive' can also be read ambiguously as either positive or negative, depending on the context of use.

By the early twentieth century, gay had accumulated a number of meanings with nuances ranging from the spiritual to the ethical and intellectual to the sensual. It was also (conventionally) gendered to reflect that spectrum of nuances, with the negative aspects of the word associated with the feminine. Yet it was used quite unselfconsciously well into the twentieth century to reflect a sense of spiritual uplift and personal well-being, which suggests that its euphemistic references to immorality were not well known and so did not compromise its use.

The non-technical terms used to refer to homosexuality by the early twentieth century included gay, but it was not so commonly used, especially among the heterosexual community. The more common terms were 'queer' (see Chapter 2), 'fag', 'faggot', 'fairy', and so on, all essentially terms of abuse outside the homosexual community. Terms such as these were used throughout the twentieth century, which was a time of great persecution of homosexual people. The Labouchere Amendment discussed above lay the groundwork for a series of scandals in the late nineteenth century, culminating in the trial of Oscar Wilde, which had interesting parallels with the trial of Socrates – both reviled as corrupters of youth, both actually guilty of an acute analysis of their own society. The legal persecution of homosexuals, defined by that trial, continued throughout the twentieth century, which also saw the Stalinist persecution of homosexuals in Russia and the Nazis' imprisonment and brutalisation of homosexuals in their notorious death camps. In the camps, homosexual prisoners were identified by the wearing of a pink triangle, which now is often used as a symbol of gay pride and rebellion. After World War II, during the McCarthyite period in Western societies (the 1950s and early 1960s) when those suspected of Communist sympathies were hounded from their jobs and homes (in the USA by a Senate subcommittee presided over by Senator Joseph McCarthy, in other countries by conservatives who followed that lead), homosexuals were also targeted as a potentially subversive group and persecuted on those grounds.

During this time societies and organisations were formed to provide support for homosexual people and fight against this persecution: for example, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee was founded in Berlin as

early as 1897 (later suppressed by the Nazis). The production of the category homosexual was, therefore, not only an occasion for public identification of homosexuals by others, but of public self-identification of homosexuals by themselves. This recognition of identity can be seen both positively and negatively: positive in that it enabled homosexuals to work together against social alienation and persecution, negative in that it was an implicit acceptance of the categories of heterosexual and homosexual (see 'Queer (Non) Identities' in the next chapter). Still, at a time of public persecution, mutual support was obviously more important and empowering for individuals than esoteric discussions about the power of categorisation.

Where such discussions became important was in the internal politics of homosexual organisations, as they debated how to relate to the newly defined heterosexual mainstream. The Mattachine Society (named after a medieval court jester who expressed unpopular truths from behind a mask (Adam 1995, p. 67)), established in Los Angeles in 1951, had intensive internal debates about the relation between themselves and the non-homosexual community. This society had a clear agenda of support and education:

- TO UNIFY' those homosexuals 'isolated from their own kind ...'
- TO EDUCATE' homosexuals and heterosexuals toward an ethical homosexual culture ... paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow-minorities – the Negro, Mexican, and Jewish Peoples ...
- TO LEAD: the 'more ... socially conscious homosexuals [are to] provide leadership to the whole mass of social deviates' and also
- TO ASSIST 'our people who are victimized daily as a result of our oppression'. (Adam 1995, p. 68)

Yet under the stress of the McCarthyite period, Adam reports that the leadership of the Mattachine was to adopt an assimilationist politics which 'insisted that gay people are just the same as heterosexuals except for what they do in bed' (Adam 1995, p. 69). This politics moves away from the liberationist strategy suggested by the society's original 'missions and purposes'. And it was not until the police raid of the Stonewall bar in Greenwich Village, 27–28 June 1969, that gay pride was able to be openly demonstrated.

Throughout the twentieth century, homosexuals had been harassed in public places, either openly by police raids of gay bars or by covert entrapment practices (in which police officers posing as homosexuals invited sexual advances which then became the basis of prosecutions). The raid of the Stonewall bar was just another example of police harassment, except that this time the bar's clientele fought back. Various accounts of the events of this evening exist, but the salient point is that the people in the bar refused to be intimidated by the police action. Several days of police harassment in the area followed, which was met with collective – sometimes violent – resistance

from the gay community. In the months following this pivotal incident, gay took on its most popular contemporary meaning, which unites the sense of joyous exaltation with an acknowledgement of social disapproval. Rather than being overwhelmed and defeated by that social disapproval, as in pre-Stonewall times, homosexual activists wore that disapproval as a badge of honour, because it was also an exclusion from the oppressive and authoritarian forces in society which codified and repressed not only homosexual citizens, but the *whole* of society.

Gay liberation was a powerful voice in the 1970s, arguing against conventional views that defined sexuality by reference to heterosexuality and the monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Adam explains that, for gay liberation, 'there was no "normal" or "perverse" sexuality, only a world of sexual possibilities ranged against a repressive order of marriage, oedipal families, and compulsory heterosexuality' (Adam 1995, p. 84). In other words, the gay liberation movement of the 1970s worked from a similar premise to many contemporary gender theorists in that they recognised in the definition or delineation of normal sexuality, the means by which men and women are both gendered and judged socially acceptable, or not.

Since the 1970s the gay community has gone through periods of relative quiet and through renewed activism around the issue of AIDS, demanding funding for research into the disease and help for those who contract it, as well as attempting to combat the homophobia which pervades many discussions of the AIDS virus in the West. The gay community has also been through periods of intense self-examination in relation to its own politics, and this will be discussed more fully in Chapters 2 and 4. In defining the history of the term 'gay' it is important to note the context in which the word acquired the meanings it has today, and it is also important to note that those defined by the term are a heterogeneous group.

Historical research shows that, within the homosexual community itself, 'gay' has had particular nuances, depending on its social context. So while it was used widely in the 1950s in the US homosexual community, in the UK 'gay' had a specific class inflection; it referred to the upper socioeconomic bracket; a gay club was seen as classier than the queer pubs associated with those from lower socioeconomic groups. At the same time, 'queer' was a term widely used in the non-homosexual community, almost always with negative connotations (see Chapter 2). The use of the term 'gay', therefore, is an implicit rejection of the labelling applied by the heterosexual community, basically by those whose own socioeconomic status empowered them to take such a stance. At the same time, however, it signifies that the homosexual or gay community is as varied, by class, ethnicity, race, age and so on, as the heterosexual community.

'Gay', then, is the term around which members of the homosexual community choose at times to make strategic alliances in order to fight for common

causes. An analogy might be drawn with the use of the term 'Christian'. There are very many different kinds of Christians, from different backgrounds and cultures, following different churches, who may at times choose to forget their differences in pursuit of a common goal. In fact, the gay community is rather less internally divided than the Christian community. However, these differences exist, with gay often still used primarily to refer to the more affluent and socially mobile members of the homosexual community. This acknowledgement should not weaken the notion of a gay community, but rather should prevent any heterosexual attempt to lump all gay people together as a homogeneous group, as a function of their (heterosexually defined) sexuality. The obvious analogy here is with sexist descriptions of women which identify all women as a function of their biology, ignoring differences of ethnicity, race, class, age and so on. As noted above, the terms which are used within and without the gay community to describe individuals – such as 'gay' and 'queer' – historically had different class connotations. To these might be added differences of gender, race, ethnicity, age and so on, for example gay is less likely to be used to refer to lesbians (see above) than to male homosexuals. So while 'gay' is a signifier of shared concerns and interests, it does not signal a community any more homogeneous than the heterosexual community.

Identity

In the discussion of the word 'gay' and the ways in which it has been used strategically by people choosing to identify as being gay, we have opened up the question of what identity is. The concept of identity, like that of the subject and subjectivity which we discussed early in this chapter, has undergone something of a major revision in our postmodern times. Earlier views of individuals as self-determined, integrated beings have been replaced by a more complex notion of individuals as multiple subjectivities, sometimes described as fractured or split (to make the difference from the earlier concept clear). In this postmodern revaluation of the concept of subjectivity, we might question the fate of a concept related to both subjectivity and experience – identity.

As we have seen in our discussion of the production of the homosexual as a negative classification, identities can sometimes be turned around, and mobilised for positive political ends. For many people identity has been a very useful concept in that it enables them to discuss their common experience of the world with others whom they regard as like them; that is, others who share what they see as crucial features of their social positioning (such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class and so on). The example of being gay has been extensively outlined above. This has been particularly important for those whose experience has been devalued by normative or regulatory notions of experience derived from the interrelationships of one or more

step of recognising that these oppositions are hierarchical was a major breakthrough in our study of social, including gendering, practice.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1978) also wrote about the privileging of one term in these oppositions – the equivalent to Cixous's hierarchy. Derrida explained that not only is one term privileged above the other, but that the secondary term in the binary is central to the definition of the privileged term. The first term could not exist or function without the second unprivileged term. The secondary term is therefore permitted no autonomy but derives its meaning purely through its opposition to the nature of the privileged term. Its only functional role seems to be to act as a support to the meaning of the primary term. So, in an opposition such as man/woman, the term 'man' is privileged; it exists as the dominant term in the hierarchy, man/woman. Also the term 'woman' has no independent existence, no autonomy; it exists as the negative or opposite of the primary term, 'man'. Man is defined as what woman is not – activity, sun, culture, father, head, intelligible, logos. So when Freud charted the semiotic (meaning-making) practices of his own time, it is not surprising that he recorded that woman has no autonomy, sexual or otherwise. She is simply the 'other' of man. In the terms Freud recorded at the beginning of the twentieth century, man/woman did not equate with penis/clitoris (or clitoris + labia), but with penis/no penis; that is, woman is sexually a void, a receptacle of sexuality that is essentially male.

Lorde and others use a similar deconstructive practice; rather than reverse the opposition, instead they reveal how the hidden secondary term is pivotal for the meaning of the primary term and deconstruct its position as primary. The other term in the binary is recognised as a construction that defines, by opposition, the dominant term. In this sense, there is no other term (that is, man/woman is, more correctly, man/not man; there is no woman). As Lorde says, it is ignored; we refuse to recognise it. A politics of difference, on the other hand, is based on a foregrounding of that recognition. It demands relational, rather than oppositional, thinking. By placing the secondary term of the binary at the heart of the dominant term, this relational thinking deconstructs not only the power relation in which the terms are engaged, but also the meaning of each term – the dominant term (why is it defined in certain ways?), but also the absent secondary term (who does this term refer to? how is it related to their actual conditions of being?).

This relational thinking had many ramifications for feminists. For example, the notion of 'patriarchy' came under challenge since it assumed that male or masculinity inevitably equated with power and privilege. Yet, it was clear that to be male and black did not automatically equate with privilege in every situation, nor did male and working class. So the simple category man was seen as not sufficient when a particular situation or event or individual was

ation or the event or person, but it was not the sole determinant. So, gender was seen to be just one factor operating in the production of an event or an individual subjectivity, and it needed to be considered in relation to other factors, such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and so on.

Psychoanalysis and the Other

It is obvious that psychoanalysis too will have a great deal to offer in terms of thinking about the relations between selves and others. Probably most important to thinking about the question of the Other in feminism and psychoanalysis are the revisions to the classic Freudian story of the Oedipus complex, and the various feminist challenges and reinterpretations of it. Psychoanalysts of all kinds are interested in how those others outside us are drawn inside of us; how our 'others' come to reside within us. Both the French feminists and Object relations theorists are keenly interested in the relations between the Self and the Other.

We mentioned earlier the work of Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow: they elaborate on early work by Melanie Klein (1963) on mothering as the key factor in gender development. Dinnerstein and Chodorow are interested in the way children consolidate a core gender identity in the first two years of life, long before the moment where Freud imagined children entered the Oedipus complex. These theorists put the emphasis on the importance of the mentally healthy child's integration of the various love objects into his or her ego, and stress that the power differential in current parenting arrangements makes it unlikely that a healthy, balanced ego will be produced. The close union with the mother is repudiated, in part because of her devalued status, and the child turns to the father for a source of identification. As we said earlier in this chapter, this psychoanalytic approach provides a more intersubjective and socially oriented account of psychic reality.

Jessica Benjamin (1988) has argued that the devaluation of the need for the Other becomes the touchstone of adult masculinity. She further argues that Western culture has privileged and institutionalised the masculine ideal of separation, autonomy, self-reliance and individualism as the model for subjectivity, and relegated the qualities associated with the feminine, such as connection, relation and nurturance, to the private sphere. Her point is that all people regardless of gender need to balance agency and mutuality, self-assertion and recognition of the other, in order to achieve maturity and individuation.

French feminist psychoanalysis, which is associated with writers such as Luce Irigaray (1985b), Julia Kristeva (1982) and Catherine Clement (1989), has a different approach to this question of the Other. They have retained and

mechanisms of desire – drives, impulses, object choices and so on. Their approaches stress the internal splitting and division of the self, where Object relations theory is more likely to stress the integration of different parts of the self in healthy development, with splitting (disavowal) seen as a mark of pathology.

To understand what French feminism means by splitting, we must return to Lacan's theory of the infant's move into the Symbolic order. Earlier we discussed Lacan's argument that the unconscious is structured like a language. He also argued that language acquisition marks the child's break with the mother and his or her socialisation into the dominant social order, which Lacan called 'the Symbolic order'. Lacan characterises the symbolic order as a patriarchal order dominated by paternal law, which he called *le nom du père*. In Lacan's original French text, this is a play on words. The *nom* means name and refers to the father as head of the household, the social system of patrilineality. But it also sounds like *non*, no in French. Father says No! While Freud speculated that the father is the third side in the triangle which prohibits union with the mother (incest prohibition), and breaks up the happy couple of mother and infant, Lacan used a paternal metaphor, an idea of the fundamentally patriarchal nature of symbolic systems as the agent that prohibits or renders impossible the complete fulfilment of the child's wishes and fantasies.

So this outsider, this 'other' which is language begins a process of loss. The child will try to get back what the *nom* of the Father has taken through language. Lacan saw the operation of Oedipus as an example of metonymy. Metonymy is like metaphor, except that instead of making meaning through association, metonymy makes meaning through substitution. The classic example of metonymy is 'all hands on deck'. Read literally, it conjures up a picture of a galleon with fifty sailors with their hands flat down on the deck like a maritime game of Twister. Read figuratively, metonymically, it is understood that it means all fifty sailors should be standing on the deck, ready for the captain's orders. Language will substitute for the loss the child has suffered.

The Other Within

So, with the no of the father, the infant starts to separate from the mother, and transfers its desire for its mother to an Other. But how does this Other come into being? Lacan devised the idea of the 'mirror stage' to explain how the infant begins the process of emerging from the symbiosis with the mother (1977a). Sometime between the ages of 6–18 months, he says, the infant is able to recognise its own image, its own physical unity in a mirror or through an

this mirror image, the same all-powerful status that it imagines its m/Other to have. The infant has also been developing a notion that there is a being who is all-powerful, as is indeed the case in early life. Mother controls food and comfort, and until the infant confronts castration, it will start to hypothesise the existence of a supremely powerful being. The infant begins to separate from the m/other, seeing her as a whole being separate from itself, and then, in a flash, seeing itself, also as a wholly separate being. In the moment this realisation takes place, the infant installs within itself a fantasy of itself as all-powerful, holding on to the first notion that it had of the omnipotent carer in its universe. It installs an Other within itself.

To add a Freudian spin to what we explained about the operation of gender in Chapter 1, one is a man to the extent that one does not desire other men, but desires only those women who are substitutes for the mother; one is a woman to the extent that one does not desire other women and desires only those men who are substitutes for the father. And this is how Lacan imagines that the Oedipus complex generates these identifications and new desires: as a system of substitutions, exchanges, of one love object for another. So in other words, in order to become a subject, the principle of otherness must be internalised. It desires a fantasy, a fantasy of itself as whole, complete, omnipotent. In Lacan's version of Oedipus, both men and women are deprived of the phallus, both are castrated in the sense that both have lost the sense of plenitude and the fantasy of omnipotence experienced in early symbiosis with the mother. For Lacan the acquisition of language is the moment of castration.

Lacan's 'Lack' and the Power of the Phallus

Through the mirror stage, language and law impose themselves on the body like images. It is through substitution, through an endless metonymic chain of language that the subject pursues the ever-elusive object of desire. It is through language that the subject seeks to evoke the presence of the absent Other or the object of desire. Whereas in Freud the sight of an absent penis initiates the flight from the mother, the castration complex and the Oedipus complex, in Lacan, there is no penis. Lacan speaks instead about a 'Phallus'.

For Lacan, the phallus is not the penis, but the universal signifier of loss. No one, anywhere, has the phallus.

It is not a little flap of flesh. The phallus stands in a series of substitutions that give voice to lack or loss, what Lacan calls *manque à être*, a fundamental

of desire. It hearkens to plenitude, unity, wholeness, before separation from the mother, outside mortality. The all-powerful mother which is fantasised is sometimes called a 'phallic woman'. Lacan also calls the phallus, the principle of loss which underlies the Symbolic (which, in turn, underlies language and culture) the 'transcendental signifier'.

This lack can be either masculine or feminine. Lack is what makes the subject decentred for Lacan. Unlike the efforts of Object relations theorists, who hope that a whole subject can eventually produced, in this theory, there can be no unified subject, only the imaginary fantasy of one. Threatened with castration, the boy can sidestep into identifying with the father's imaginary potency, but the girl does not have this access to phallic power open to her, unless she is willing to become masculinised (a phallic woman), or to imagine that her mother is hiding a penis (fetishism).

Critiques of 'The Phallus'

While it is certainly possible to imagine that the phallus is not a penis, that the phallus is an attribute of power that no one, neither men nor women have, it still remains the case, as many gender analysts such as Jane Gallop (1982) have argued, that the phallus and the penis, in the current political climate, can be conflated or confused. And once confused, it will seem that Lacan's ideas about the phallus, his 'transcendental signifier', will support a social structure which assigns power to men rather than women. As Gallop (1982) has noted:

And as long as psychoanalysts maintain the separability of 'phallus' from 'penis', they can hold on to their 'phallus' in the belief that their discourse has no relation to sexual inequality, no relation to politics. (p. 97)

How much easier it would have been had Lacan called this universal signifier of loss the navel. It could signify the separation from the Mother, and the inscription on each body of the idea of mortality and loss (Bronfen 1989).

To return at last to the French feminists, and 'splitting', we now know what is meant by this word. Splitting is the installation of the principle of the 'Other' at the heart of the subject.

For French feminists, such splitting, or disavowal, in the subject is not curable. The self is always seen as a decentred subject for French feminists.

Splitting is the installation of the principle of the 'Other' at the heart of the subject.

Julia Kristeva (1982) developed the idea of the 'Other' at the heart of the Subject with her discussion of abjection. In the process of learning to draw the boundaries between what is proper to 'me' and what is 'not-me', the subject develops a disgusted fascination with the abject products of the body (blood, sweat, urine, mucus, faeces and so on). This fascination is one with boundaries, the borderlines of the self.

The concept of abjection derives from the disgusted fascination with products expelled from the body, which mark the boundaries of the body and the subject.

The reaction of disgust is due in part to how tenuous, how porous this boundary between outside and inside, between Self and Other, can be. In Chapter 5, we will discuss how Iris Young has used this idea to develop an understanding of the social unconsciousness of racism, sexism and other rejections of Other – she sees a psychoanalytic explanation as useful for understanding the very viscosity of such rejections. We will also see, in Chapter 4, the split between Self and Other called upon to explain the pleasure people take from watching films, or looking at fashion photography.

We have barely scratched the surface of these psychoanalytic theories, which no doubt seem quite complex. We will show in the next chapters how different writers have used them to understand particular cultural productions, and in this way, they should become easier to grasp. The one idea which is particularly compelling about Lacanian-based theories of the subject is the installation of a fantasy of omnipotence, of phallic potency, at the base of all subjects. While we might certainly want to question the timeless inevitability that seems to go along with this theory, an unconscious desire for completeness and self-sufficiency at the base of individual subjects, and at the base of symbolic systems of language and culture, might go a long way to understanding the way the Western world functions. In the next section, we will be looking again at this question of power, but from a Foucauldian perspective.

Difference and Power

One of the significant changes which accompanied the reassessment of binary thinking was a new way of thinking about power. In major nineteenth- and early to mid-twentieth-century social and cultural theory, power is usually described as a characteristic of some group in society – men, the middle

against us or others. This way of thinking about power is still very common; how often do we blame things which happen to us or our society on some invisible 'they'? It is also the kind of thinking which is spoofed and parodied in television programmes such as *The X-Files*, which constantly discover ever more obscure cadres of bad guys (all male) who secretly control not only the USA, but the whole world (via the metaphor of alien invasion). Every now and then *The X-Files* turns the parody back on itself and deconstructs the top-down view of power on which many of the stories are based, for example when the cigarette man reveals that it was actually he who shot JFK.

For Marxist theorists, for example, the middle classes are in the position of Self, the dominant position – and they maintain that position by a systematic repression of the working classes. In this view the working classes are both repressed and powerless. This view of bourgeois society does explain some social behaviours and situations. However, it has a number of negative consequences. First, it constitutes the working classes as victims and makes it very difficult to imagine how they might ever improve their social situation – except perhaps by the goodwill of the middle classes. Second, it does not provide a way of understanding how it is that working-class people do exercise power, both to resist bourgeois demands and in their social and personal relationships.

Some feminist theorists took a similar position in relation to men and women. For them, men have all the power and they maintain it by a systematic repression of women. Again, however, this view has a number of negative consequences. Women are constructed as victims, structurally incapable of improving their social positioning other than by the goodwill of individual men. Also, this view does not explain how women do exercise power, both in their working environment and in their social and personal relationships.

One way of rethinking power is to see it as relational, rather than hierarchical (as we rethought the binaries discussed earlier). Instead of power being seen as a repressive force that some people have access to and others don't, power can be thought of simply as enabling; power enables things to happen. Foucault uses the metaphor of the matrix to describe power. The matrix is constituted in two ways: first, by many different relations of force – cooperative, resistant and transformative – that operate in a given sphere of activity, and second, by the strategies by which they operate (that is, that organise those lines of force in effective and enabling patterns or vectors). This matrix in operation, and not simply repressive force, is what Foucault describes as power:

power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society. (Foucault 1981, p. 93)

or individuals; rather, it is our perception of the matrix of forces in operation that we recognise as power.

Foucault also notes that an important implication of this view is that the operations of power can be grasped at a local, not only global, level: 'it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable' (p. 93). This understanding is critical for the development of gender studies because it essentially confirms the value of the study. After all, if gender relations are conceived as universal and immutable – and as hierarchical and irresistible – then any study of them seems pointless. However, if instead, that immutability, universality and irresistibility are reconceived as strategies that are part of the operation of power, then it becomes crucial to study the minute operations of these matrices of power, in order that their strategies may be understood and the power relations themselves disrupted. That is, if power is manifest in these local strategies, then disrupting the local force relations can disrupt the entire matrix of power itself, since it can lead us to the strategies which organise the matrix to produce global/ising effects to which we object. These strategies include the very notion that particular ideas and relations are immutable, universal and irresistible.

Another important corollary of Foucault's model of power is that power is seen as pervasive: 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (p. 93). This means that we are all implicated in the operations of power. No particular group can absent itself from the operation of power because no group exists in isolation. Even within the most isolated group, power will operate. In Foucault's terms, lines of force will run through that group which will operate strategically at certain points to produce effects.

So, if power is relational, and we are all involved in it, then it becomes very difficult to hold to a position that simply attributes power to any one group in society. This is not the same thing as saying that some groups are not potentially privileged by their position within mainstream society; for example women of colour remind white feminists not to ignore their 'white skin privilege' that sets them apart from non-white feminists. However, it does argue against simplistic structural models which hold that all men are abusive and all women are victims. In a real sense, it opens the way for more complex studies of gender relations and the way those relations are articulated and reproduced.

The development of a notion of identity as multiple and fragmented, rather than essentialist and unitary, has been critical for contemporary feminisms. This multiple subjectivity is a way of thinking about the differences among women, and also recognising what women share – their embodiment as women. Donna Haraway (1991, p. 155) writes: 'Identities seem contradictory, partial, and strategic.' Her formulation recognises that a subject negotiates a range of roles and positionings so that it is never wholly focused on any particular positioning (partial); that some of the positionings the subject negotiates may be in conflict (contradictory); and that the subject positions her or himself at any specific moment in relation to the context in which she/he finds her/himself (strategic). Therefore, this subject is able to negotiate strategic alliances with other women and with men at particular moments or locations to achieve an end – rather than identify her/himself always with one specific political end or process.

This strategic nature of contemporary feminism is what has given rise to the claims that we are in a postfeminist era. For many women, this seems a silly claim since it suggests that gender relations and gender identities are no longer problematic, and they know that is not the case. However, another way of reading the term 'postfeminist' is more like 'post-second-wave-feminist': that is, it is a challenging of earlier feminisms which locked women into silences and repressions of critical aspects of their subject positionings (for example non-white, working class, lesbian). 'Postfeminism' is one term for the freeing of women from the ideological straitjackets imposed by some feminisms, enabling them to recognise their differences from other women and so to eradicate the silences within feminism; to form new, respectful alliances with women different from themselves, and to learn from those women; to position their own feminist critique specifically in relation to their own cultural background (and its implicit beliefs, values, behaviours and desires).

Contemporary feminist theory and practice is extraordinarily diverse. Perhaps the essence of what separates these contemporary versions from earlier feminisms is their response to the demands for a politics of difference. The focus on difference and the concept of multiple subjectivity that expresses the many different positionings available to the individual had two responses: a greater focus on the individual, and a greater focus on the strategies for collective action. The attention to difference and specificity led to an intense investigation of the production of individual subjectivity which, for some, meant a greater focus on aspects other than gender which generate individual identity, for example class, race, ethnicity and sexuality. Non-white and working-class and lesbian feminists articulated their concerns as women of colour, as working class, as lesbian, enabling them to form alliances with women from similar backgrounds, ethnicity and sexuality. Such alliances

they were increasingly able to generate. The other response – to focus on collective action – mobilised feminists to explore the nature of both their differences and similarities and work towards the elimination of inequities that separate women – racism, homophobia and classism. For many feminists this involved a complete rethinking of their own positioning, a revaluation of their own social roles to account for the way in which racism, homophobia and classism are essential to the maintenance of those roles. It also involved a revisioning of their own theories and practices to eradicate those elements, along with a recognition of where and how their own specific positionings are inscribed in those theories and practices.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Several strands in feminist theory and practice which show clearly the gradual positioning of feminist knowledge are sometimes grouped under the umbrella term 'feminist standpoint theory'. This phrase pulls together disparate thinkers and trends in feminist thought (see the special issue of *Signs* (1997) as a good starting point). Out of second-wave feminism's emphasis on relying on the experience and consciousness of women as a starting place for analysis came the articulation of knowledge as located and situated. This work also emphasised that reality, rather than being available to a neutral observer, is socially and materially constructed. As Dorothy Smith has pointed out, a variety of philosophers and researchers, particularly those working in the social sciences, became concerned to identify, highlight and subvert, where possible, the 'embedding of the standpoint of white men as hidden agent and subject' (1990, p. 394). What developed gradually in the 1970s and 80s were several related methodologies which relied on valorising the experience of women, as subjects in research and knowledge, a political methodology which had been foundational to the women's movement.

For the social analysts shaped by these foundational ideas, it was important to connect everyday life with the analysis of social institutions that shape life (Hartsock 1983). Social analysts came to see local practices as knowledge. How and where to go shopping; how to read a book; or how to get on a bus and go to work; local competencies such as these were seen as a kind of knowledge. And if the practices which people acquire through their experience are seen as knowledge, they themselves can be seen as knowers, and able to share their knowledge. It is important to point out here that while the slogan 'the personal is political' has been interpreted in myriad ways, most feminist standpoint theorists were referring to the reconstruction of the standpoint of historically shared, group-based experiences. As Patricia Hill Collins argued: 'Groups have a degree of permanence over time such that

Hartsock (1983) would stress a Marxist subject: the subjects who matter are not individual subjects but collective subjects, or groups. These methodologies and theories argue against 'the view from nowhere', the belief in a disembodied objectivity that Cartesian thought instituted.

In short, feminist standpoint theory:

- defines knowledge as particular rather than universal
- rejects the neutral observer of modernist epistemology
- defines subjects as constructed by relational forces rather than as transcendent.

The first articulations of feminist standpoint theory are generally taken to be typified by the work of Nancy Hartsock (1983). Her argument, which was clearly caught up in the liberatory discourses of second-wave feminism, argued that one location, that of the standpoint of women, was privileged because it provided a vantage point that reveals the truth of social reality. That is, that some perceptions of reality are partial, others true and liberatory. So, even though feminist social scientists wanted to highlight the limits and specific shape of the white-bourgeois-male view from nowhere which had become embedded in empirical social science, the belief in a liberatory standpoint of women was based on a certain essentialism and lingering beliefs in the universality of knowledge. What some theorists wanted to do was make a leap directly from the experiential knowledge we garner from our social life to claims to universal knowledge – that these particular knowledges could write the script to make us all free. The essentialism that was part of some of these attempts to change the shape of what knowledge was assumed to be, often constructed the category woman and the social group women as a unified and totalisable whole.

But as became clear with the participation of women of colour in these epistemological debates in the 1970s and 80s, this essentialist category left little room for the consideration of the impact of race on such investigations into the status of knowledge. Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) argued that if the differences between women were to be taken seriously and the conclusion that women occupy many different standpoints and thus inhabit many different realities, this thesis that the standpoint of woman is liberatory must be re-examined. Yet many thinkers were not sure how to continue imagining a knowledge and categories in that knowledge that were particular, and which would allow change. If we abandon the monolithic concept of 'woman', some asked, what are the possibilities of a cohesive feminist politics? Various issues were raised. If

become impossible, because there would be too many issues to take into consideration? And if these multiple realities are acknowledged, how can one choose between them? What or who would legitimate knowledge? How to choose? These were questions that came predominantly from white middle-class thinkers in feminism, and show lingering traces of the presumption of a central viewpoint, the 'god trick' that was so disdained in 'malestream' thought. Imagine a black woman rising in the morning, thinking, 'Now which shall I wear today, the breasts or the skin?' For many feminists, these difficulties of choosing between multiple perspectives or issues were not new.

Fractured Identities

The response to this question of how to give up the essentialist and universal categories, which had structured the pursuit of knowledge and theories of revolution, came through a growing recognition of the importance of coalition – of choosing a unity based on affinity not identity. Chela Sandoval's (1991) notion of the importance of strategic identity for women of colour represents an important advance in understanding this process, as does her development of the notion of oppositional consciousness. She points out that the category 'woman of colour' is not one which is based on some natural biological indicator, such as skin, or sex, or blood, but is rather a group which is united by affinity, by the decision to come together against a common cause.

Sandoval argues that what she calls US Third World feminism can function as a model for oppositional political activity. She proposes that we view the world as a kind of 'topography' that defines the points around which 'individuals and groups seeking to transform oppressive powers constitute themselves as resistant and oppositional subjects' (1991, p. 11). She holds that once the 'subject positions' of the dominated are 'self-consciously recognised by their inhabitants', they can be 'transformed into more effective sites of resistance' (p. 11). What we can see developing here in standpoint theory is the idea of the standpoint as conscious decision and intervention in the construction and reconstruction of our lives. As Kathi Weeks (1996) puts it: 'A standpoint is a project, not an inheritance; it is achieved not given' (p. 92).

Cyborg Feminism

One exciting voice in this contemporary feminist debate is Donna Haraway (whose work on identity was referred to earlier). In her essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Haraway (1991) used the concept of the cyborg, the hybrid being

heterosexism. So queer itself becomes a kind of fashionable non-identity, which is an identity.

This debate continues today, and it may be argued that this attests to the value of queer as a concept – that it provokes debate, destabilises identities and challenges attitudes and values. Furthermore, it should be noted again that queer accords with poststructuralist understandings about the nature of subjectivity – that it is a process of constant negotiation, not of stable identity, and so challenges stereotypes of gender and sexuality.

Bisexual Identities

Another positioning which is often seen as fundamentally interrogative of categories of gender is bisexuality. Like transvestism and transsexualism, bisexuality disrupts the social categorisation of male and female, heterosexual and homosexual as binary opposites. For some bisexuals the gay liberation movement of the 1970s had a negative side in that a normative notion of gay identity began to evolve; gay men do not have sex with women; lesbians do not have sex with men. Bisexuals, who have sex with both same-sex and opposite-sex partners, found themselves excluded by both homosexual and heterosexual society. Garber notes in her study of bisexuality *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (1995) that bisexuality is:

a sexuality that undoes sexual orientation as a category, a sexuality that threatens and challenges the easy binarities of straight and gay, queer and 'het,' and even, through its biological and physiological meanings, the gender categories of male and female. (1995, p. 65)

Her study encompasses many well-known figures such as Oscar Wilde and Virginia Woolf, whose bisexuality has often been suppressed in the analysis of their sexual ambiguity or social aberrance. She also explores the extensive politics of the bisexual movement which was organised to combat the exclusion of bisexuals from what they saw as essentialist sexual movements and categorisations – which included both transsexualism and homosexuality. Perhaps the most important observations about bisexuality are those offered by Garber in her introduction to *Vice Versa*: 'Why, instead of hetero-, homo-, auto-, pan-, and bisexuality, do we not simply say "sexuality"?' And does bisexuality have something fundamental to teach us about the nature of human eroticism? (1995, p. 15).

categorisation of male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual as binary opposites.

Masculine Identities: The Men's Movement and Men's Studies

The questioning of the category woman has not surprisingly been accompanied by a questioning of the category of man. Another contributor to the development of gender studies as an interdisciplinary site is the men's movement. This is a relatively recent formation, comprising men's groups with a number of different – sometimes conflicting – perspectives and agendas in relation to gender relations and gendered identities. The history of these groups tells us a lot about why they are so diverse. Some men's groups, for example, developed alongside feminism and in support of it. Men in these groups usually accepted feminist analyses of social practice and gendered experience and worked to minimise their own involvement in the oppression of women. Other men's groups developed out of men's frustration with what they saw as anti-male prejudice in society, particularly with issues such as childcare and child custody after divorce. For others again dissatisfaction with the roles allocated them in society was the impetus to gather together and explore unconventional options; while others embraced the conventional and worked to reverse many recent social changes, particularly those related to gender. As this thumbnail sketch indicates, with such different histories these groups cannot be said to have a single voice, and some voices are directly contradictory. It may be useful, therefore, to spell out in some more detail what the major groupings are, and what are their concerns.

David Throop (1996) divides the contemporary men's movement in the United States into five distinct strands. Writing of the movement in Australia, Michael Flood (1996) locates four strands, with the major difference between the two being Throop's inclusion of a Christian strand. Throop notes of the Christian strand that it is generally anti-feminist, disapproves of homosexuality and favours traditional gender roles. There is a tendency for Christian men's groups to regard men as innately violent and to see it as society's role to control that violence. The violence of contemporary (US) society is, for them, proof of social failure and disintegration, which they relate to the breakdown of the family (which in turn is often traced to the influence of women's liberation movements). For them the answer lies in fundamentalist Christianity, with its narrow conventional views on gender. Those conservative Christian views on gender are the rationale for a gendered division of

1. Think of an example of a Freudian slip you have made. If you think of it as signifying unconscious processes that you might have not felt able to voice directly, what might your particular slip have meant?
2. Apply Althusser's ideas about the connection between ideology and subjectivity to one of the ideological state apparatuses with which you are involved (for example the education system). Are there ways in which you think you resist the coercive power of ideology?
3. How does a focus on the father or the mother in psychoanalytic theory change the ways in which the individual is conceptualised or understood? Applying these different paradigms to your own experience, which seems more productive, and why?
4. How does the concept of 'difference' help you to understand your own experience? How does it expand or enhance the way we think about identity, especially as strategic? Apply this concept of difference to how you understand your own subjectivity and relationships.
5. How are difference and otherness related – or different? Can you give examples of how the two concepts might be employed to conceptualise other people? And how do they function in our understanding of ourselves?
6. Give some examples of how the 'abject', in Kristeva's terms, operates within gendered practices. Think, for example, of the coyness that attends advertisements for tampons. What do you think are the effects of the manipulation of abjection on the individual and social practice?
7. Think of a particular social situation in which you have been involved (for example university seminar, chat with friends or family interaction). Try to specify all the different power relations that have operated in that context. Where do you locate yourself in that network of power relations?
8. Explore the notion of partial or split or multiple subjectivity by specifying what you consider your own identity to be. What different factors are involved in specifying that identity (for example gender, class, ethnicity, age and so on)? Do you enact the same identity at all times, or do you strategically compose your identity to suit the situation in which you are involved?
9. Think of the different sexed identities that challenge stable notions of heterosexuality (for example transvestism, posttranssexualism or queer). Locate one or more instances in which you have experienced this identity (or non-identity) operating – in your own life, in the people around you, in a text. How has it challenged heteronormative conceptions of gender and sexuality? What is your own response to this (you might consider here the role and meanings of abjection)?
10. Do you think men's studies has a major place in gender studies? Explore how different strands of men's studies can be used in the critical analysis of gender by

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