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# Introduction: Gender Relations in Context

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## What is This Book About?

Fundamental transformations in men's and women's lives are taking place in western societies (Hennessy, 2000, Walby, 1997). Empirical studies are beginning to detail how traditional 'gender roles' no longer look the same, mean the same or feel the same. Popular media commentaries have taken up these changes and characterized them as simple gender confusion and loss: 'Who's wearing the apron?', 'When men were men and knew it', 'Men lose out to women's touch at work'. Part of the difficulty in discussing these questions is that gender relations are one of the most contested areas of human behaviour. It is also an area that intersects individually and collectively across a range of cultural arenas that includes, for example, politics, family, employment, leisure and schooling. However, such discussions of gender tend to remain disconnected from the complexity of contemporary social relations. In response, *Gender, Culture and Society* provides a systematic investigation and evaluation of how we might make best sense of social change and contemporary femininities and masculinities.

Confronted by the lack of consensus about these much-debated issues, it is easy to overlook the fact that a fundamental transformation in social theory has occurred. Perhaps the most important advance in feminist theory is that gender relations have been problematized. In other words, gender can no longer be seen as a simple, natural fact (Flax, 1990). This book is about continuing to problematize, contest and interrogate current popular understandings of femininities and masculinities by engaging with a range of feminist, sociological and cultural studies frameworks, bringing together main theories, key concepts and major debates. This book is also about a social imagining. Consequently, the book may be read as an attempt to jostle the imagination of the reader, by providing some more metaphors for living life, some more complexities to disturb old routines, some more politics to disrupt the functions of the past, some more views to punctuate the now crumbling view of a unified social order (Plummer, 1992: xviii–xix). Thus, resulting from the following inquiry is an evaluation

of past understandings and analysis of implications for contemporary political practice. Informed by our own reading of existing studies and our own empirical research, we offer a critical yet constructive diagnosis of the origins and development of current conditions and controversies enveloping gender relations (Mac an Ghaill, 1996).

We set out to make a conceptual intervention in existing studies of masculinities and femininities. This book does this by situating the discussion of contemporary femininities and masculinities within three main aims. These are as follows:

1. To explore how changes in gender relations are linked to wider social and cultural transformations in late modernity (see below). Connections between social change and gender are evident at a number of different moments in social and cultural history. However, it is important to consider how currently gender is an increasingly visible category that has contextually specific meanings attached to it.

2. To explore the theoretical and conceptual tensions that become apparent by exploring approaches to gender relations *alongside* each other, including feminism, studies on masculinities and post-structuralism (see below). Central to our examination of femininity and masculinity is identifying the possibilities involved in the connections between gender and social change.

3. To recognize that the struggle for gender and sexual equality is occurring at a time of rapid global change in which there is criticism from the political right and left of the limits of feminist politics and the emergence of men's movements in the west. Furthermore, there are alternative responses from developing countries highlighting the limits of western accounts that depend upon specific US or European-based concepts, while claiming universal application.

## **The Sex/Gender Category as a Cultural Flashpoint: Mobilizing Gender in the New Modernizing Project**

B.L. Marshall (1994: 6), in her text, *Engendering Modernity*, critically explores the history of gender in contemporary societies. She begins:

Against the backdrop of the Enlightenment, modernity is associated with the release of the individual from the bonds of tradition, with the progressive differentiation of society, with the emergence of civil society, with political equality, with innovation and change. All these accomplishments

are associated with capitalism, industrialism, secularization, urbanization and rationalization.

In other words, the concept of modernity here does not refer to a simple description of contemporary societies. Rather, it suggests a theoretical model based on the interaction of four major deeply structured processes – the political, the economic, the social and the cultural – developing over long periods of time, in response to major changes (Hall, 1992; Hall and Gieben, 1992; Hall, *et al.*, 1992).

Presently, in response to recent major transformations, social theorists have offered a range of contrasting accounts of contemporary western societies, in an attempt to capture the suggested defining features of what they refer to as late modernity. These defining features include globalization, risk, individualization and reflexivity (see definitions below; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens, 1992; Smart and Neale, 1999). Theorists of late modernity suggest that individuals (or modern subjects) in detraditionalizing western cultures are intrinsically linked to social and cultural transformations, involving processes of fragmentation, dislocation and mobility (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Laclau, 1990; Urry, 2000). More specifically, for Marshall (1994), a key current task for theorists of gender is how to respond to claims that the project of modernity has exhausted itself. The starting point of this book is that our specific location is within late modernity and each chapter explores what this means in relation to gendered lives. Of particular importance has been the effect of globalizing forces on gender relations (Altman, 2001; Bauman, 1992). At a general level, globalization may be understood as referring to the economic, cultural and political processes, procedures and technologies underpinning the current ‘time – space’ compression that is producing a sense of immediacy and simultaneity about the world (Brah *et al.*, 1999).

Placing ourselves within late modernity, as we explain below, signals a wish to hold onto a synthesis between theories of gender developed within modernity, for example, early feminist and gay/lesbian accounts and more recent critiques of these positions, for example, post-structuralism and queer theory.<sup>1</sup> We argue that there is much explanatory value in emphasizing the interpenetration of old and new social and cultural representations and practices and how gendered relationships are undergoing a series of fusions, conflicts, amalgamations and contradictions. For example, we wish to address the limitations of theorists working within older static theoretical frameworks based on industrial models of society (Bruegal, 1996). More specifically, the gendered dualism of male breadwinners and female homemakers have been projected as defining cultural images, exemplifying a naturalized social order, functional to the prerequisites of western, industrial capitalism. We suggest that this old modernist language is not able to

grasp the generational specificities of emerging femininities and masculinities. A late modernity framework helpfully suggests that consumption can now be seen as a key dynamic move away from production (paid labour) in shaping contemporary identities, meanings and self-expression – in short, how we enact contemporary lifestyles (Baudrillard, 1988; Bocoock, 1993). At the same time, processes of regendering are central to this move, with media-led projections of young men, within traditionally defined female space, refashioning masculinities (Nixon, 1996).

A key argument of this book is that we are experiencing a shift from the establishment of the social constitution of gender associated with modernity politics to the gendering of society that has an intensified resonance among (heterosexual) men and women in late modernity. We suggest that at this current historical juncture the category gender has become a lens to make sense of wider social transformations. We refer to this as a *cultural flashpoint* that we see as operating at two levels (Mac an Ghaill *et al.*, 2003; O'Sullivan, 1999).<sup>2</sup> First, at an immediate level, this intensified gendered awareness is intimately about the politics of transforming social relations and attendant changing structures and subjectivities between (heterosexual) men and women.<sup>3</sup> From different political positions, this is spoken through the rather vague notions of a *masculinity crisis*, a *backlash against feminism* or a *politics of recuperative masculinity*. (These powerful discursive constructs operating across a wide range of sites are further explored at different points in the book.) There is a sense of a transition in which the old cultural stories of gender identity formation, which are caught up in redrawing of the boundaries between men and women, are no longer making common sense (Carter *et al.*, 1993: x). For example, during the last few decades, gender shifts have been identified within high profile current public controversies, most notably such issues as the work–home balance, 'underachieving' male students and post-divorce childcare custody. Such shifts across western societies may be read as a search for a new gender settlement between women and men within conditions of late modernity.

At a second level, this is not directly a crisis of men's and women's social practices and interactions but rather the category *gender* provides the lens through which the assumed crisis is perceived and mediated. In short, the crisis has increasingly come to be spoken through gender. Hence, a gendered sensibility is no longer the preserve of political minority of political activists, such as feminists and pro-feminist men. Rather, it has become naturalized at a collective subjective level, as an epistemological organizational theme. In other words, the language of gender is increasingly used as a central means by which men and women articulate their understanding of being subjects in and objects of a world in flux (Berman, 1983). For example, the notion of gender as a lens is illustrated through the interpretative framing (that is, how we make sense) of the changing structure and meaning of paid labour.

One of the major effects of global changes on local urban sites is the collapse of regionally based manufacturing industries and expansion of the service sector, resulting in changing forms of incorporation, social division and spatial mobility of labour. These cumulative effects include new patterns in the international division of labour, the changing nature of the nation-state and the associated assumed crisis in Anglo-ethnicity, new labour processes and local labour markets within the context of deindustrialization and deregulation, new educational and work technologies, increased state regulation of youth, advanced global communication systems and diverse family forms (Appaduri, 1991; Giddens, 1990; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991). Thus, the changing structure and meaning of paid work needs to be located within the context of these diverse, interconnecting social relations at a time of rapid change (Altman, 2001; Bauman, 1992). However, this restructuring of paid work is reductively read through the lens of gender, with sustained media attention declaring a 'sex war', marked by the projected feminization of the workplace and the collapse of stable masculinities. Hence, late modernity gender is circulated as a container in which contemporary western societies' complex fears, tensions and anxieties are seeking resolution.

In *Gender, Culture and Society* we argue that within western societies, in the twenty-first century, gender and sexual identities have come to speak a wider sense of social (dis)location in globally-based, post-colonial, (de) industrializing societies (Altman, 2001; Bhatt, 1997).<sup>4</sup> The long history of the interplay between social change and shifting notions of masculinity and femininity currently has a specific cultural meaning within the late modernity of the risk society, marked by uncertainty, flux and ambivalence (Bauman, 2002, 2003). As examined in later chapters, in exploring contemporary social and cultural transformations, late modernity theorists, such as Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), have identified gender as a central element of the narrative of change within detraditionalizing western societies. They suggest that shifting gender relations are dynamically involved in the move away from the rigidity of the structural determinants of class-based industrial societies to the new modernizing project of late modernity. Furthermore, it is suggested that the effects of the deregulating of individuals from the normative demands of established social categories is that late modernity subjects (or individuals) are compelled to forge their own identity as part of a highly reflexive making of a Do-it-yourself (DIY) biography. They argue that one effect of this is that women have now become *late modernity beneficiaries or winners* in response to the barriers established through gender during industrialization being challenged and overturned.

Critics from a range of theoretical positions have questioned this universalizing and overly optimistic picture of women as late modernity winners. They point to the underplaying of structural constraints, thus

failing to address the question of power in relation to systemic inequalities that impact upon subordinated groups of women (and men) (Adkins, 2000; Harris, 2004; Lash, 1994). An important effect of this writing out of an increasingly highly differentiated allocation of material conditions, social capital and cultural resources is to see the 'failing female individual' as personally responsible for her own lack of achievement. However, as Harris (2004) argues in her critique of accounts of young women who are positioned as benefiting from the late modernity economy, nevertheless, contemporary young women are of central importance to the global demands of capitalism, both as workers and consumers (p. 37). As Weeks (1995: 4–5) makes clear with reference to a changing sex/gender order:

The anxiety about the sexual, like mysterious creatures scuttling under the floorboards, implicitly shaped many of our public debates for a long time, from the fear of national or imperial decline at the end of the nineteenth century to the structuring of the welfare provision from the 1940s to the present.<sup>5</sup>

However, as he finely illustrates, what is new is the intense public anxiety in which changing sexual behaviour, emerging gender/sexual identities and fragmenting femininities and masculinities are explicitly linked to 'debates about the current shape and desirable future of society'. Hence, whatever the empirical evidence about the changing social realities of women's and men's lives, the question of gender is currently centre stage in terms of how we make sense of the world.

Working from within a wider explanatory framework, Epstein (1988: 232) has noted that no area of social life, 'whether the gathering of crops, the ritual of religion, the formal dinner party, or the organization of government – is free from the dichotomous thinking that casts the world in categories of "male" and "female" '. In turn, there is a long history of shifts in sex/gender and racialized ethnic relations being read as a barometer of social and cultural transformations across western societies. This interdependent relationship is particularly visible at times of real or imagined crisis in society. In the United States, for example, Kimmel (1987a) has illustrated how a notion of *masculinity crisis* appears at moments of wider disturbances in the social order. The history of British sex/gender relations is littered with changing gendered images in which national internal political discontents were displaced onto gendered minorities. Historically, this has been exemplified through the State's production of a range of regulatory representations, such as the 'single mother' and more recently that of the 'career woman'. These representations are projected as the cause of family breakdown, which in turn is connected to the assumed breakdown of the moral order of society (Hughes, 2002; Lawler, 2000). The production

of these categories and their circulation through the media serves to illustrate an interesting temporal and spatial shift from the universal demonization of the 'single mother' (in the private sphere of the home) during the 1970s, to the more ambiguous current deployment of the term 'career women' (in the public sphere of paid work). The latter has occurred as more females are encouraged into the labour market in an expanding service sector, with which women have traditionally been associated (Bradley, 1996). In short, at a time of projected crisis in society, gendered minorities are coerced into carrying the gender majority's sense of moral disorder. This involves complex processes of social exclusion and psychic (unconscious) expulsion of social groups who are represented as a threat to the maintenance of social and symbolic borders.

## Knowing Possibilities: Social Change and Theories of Gender

Throughout this book, we engage with issues of social change and how we make sense of gender relations. Of key importance is an underlying tension surrounding what we mean by social change and the impact that it has on gender relations. One approach suggests the need to correlate social practices with patterns of behaviour. Thus, social change can be measured, for example, by the number of women participating in the labour market. As participation rates increase, the impact on gender can be calculated. A similar argument is based upon documenting how men and women's roles have changed. In this way, men's changing roles can be measured by how far they identify with the notion of fatherhood. This is in contrast to an approach where gender and social change are intricately connected. From this position, researchers become interested in how such processes in themselves *are* gendered. This position, in effect, collapses the notion of change and gender as disparate variables that can be measured. What becomes important is establishing how processes of social change are constituted, how social practices can be understood as gendered categories. At various moments throughout this book this tension is the dynamic for our engagement with gender and social change. Thus, in many ways, the source of the tension is epistemological. In other words, what becomes important are the reasons (or theory) we use to argue why some knowledge counts and other knowledge does not. The position taken up in this book is that both perspectives offer valuable insights into how we might connect – epistemologically – gender and social change.

The centrality of social change, at both global and local levels, is a dynamic device allowing theories of gender relations to be historically

situated and socially, culturally and politically contextualized. At the same time, gender theorists have done much work in explaining the connections between gender and social change. Earlier feminist theories have provided the social sciences with a language with which to make sense of 'structured inequality', such as the operation of institutional gender stratification, for example, within family life and the labour market. More recently, new ways of thinking, including post-structuralism, post-colonialism and queer theory have made available ways of understanding gender that are not tied to notions of patriarchy. (Patriarchy is commonly understood as a social organization that structures the dominance of men over women.) Uneasily situated alongside and within these frameworks are studies of masculinities. In response, this book explores these current theoretical and empirical uncertainties, providing a critical synthesis or mixture that brings together feminist frameworks, sociology and cultural studies. As an inclusive text, it uses the above approaches to social change to emphasize the social organization of gender and the active cultural production of competing images and social practices of femininities and masculinities within specific contexts. This enables us to understand gender relations as being central to more traditional concerns with conceptions of structural power, domestic–occupational stratification and sexual violence, alongside more recent questions of consumption, the body, desire and subjective identity formation (Butler, 1993; Cronin, 2000; Harris, 2004; Scott, 2000; Smith, 1987).

Cross-cutting such approaches to gender is the need to move away from the notion that social change has always impacted upon gender, towards a recognition that gender has become a major constituent of contemporary understandings about masculinity and femininity. What is distinctive about this position is that it does not simply suggest that social change and its impact upon gender is a recent phenomenon. For example, gender and social change have been historically seen as mutually constitutive. However, we suggest that such connections between gender and social change are currently resulting in the formation of designated ways of knowing. Such knowing has circumscribed how we might make sense of gender and social change; they provide a form of closure around what can be known. As Spanier (1993: 329) suggests:

A formalised knowledge system functions as an institution – like the law, the family, capitalism, motherhood etc – that plays a particular role in sustaining and reproducing dominant beliefs about gender and sexuality, justifying them with the power of the objective and rational academy.

Throughout this book, we suggest that theoretical and conceptual arguments can operate in regulative ways, endorsing and delegitimizing particular ideas, understandings and meanings. Therefore, it is important

to provide a critical understanding of the relative adequacy of different theoretical accounts through a series of contrasts but also to encourage a view of these theories as alternative explanations which make different assumptions about men and women, and associated processes of gender relations.

Theoretically, we are in a fortunate position and this book builds on earlier work in sociology and cultural studies, which suggests that gender relations are problematic, negotiated and contested within frameworks at individual, organizational, cultural and societal levels. Importantly, we have a range of tools with which we can analyse systematically and document coherently these levels by exploring the material, social and discursive production of gender relations. In short, gender relations can be seen as a crucial point of intersection of different forms of power, stratification, desire and subjective identity formation. A main argument of this book is the need to hold onto the productive tension between these different sociological/cultural studies explanations of gender relations (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 1997a). Recent texts reveal a tension between what are referred to as *materialist* and *post-structuralist* critiques of gender identity formation. In this book, the term *materialist* refers to social movements that perceive the organization of gendered identities as deriving from fixed bases of social power. Such bases of social power are seen to work logically and predictably, often being illustrated through an individual's occupation of fixed hierarchical positions, such as dominant/empowered (men) and subordinate/oppressed (women). This position is clearly illustrated by early feminist studies that located the source of women's oppression in the male body. In contrast, post-structuralist theorists (as outlined in the Notes to this chapter) have emphasized that the living of gender categories and divisions is more contradictory, fragmented, shifting and ambivalent than the dominant public definitions of these categories suggest. Most importantly a post-structuralist account of gender relations suggests that we cannot simply read off social behaviour from a pre-existing male-female oppositional binary structure of 'victims' and 'oppressors'. In short, *post-structuralism* explores such issues as the limits of the way that gender identity categories are portrayed in terms of social groups, such as men and women, how to make sense of the interconnectedness between multiple relations of power, such as gender, class, sexuality and disability, and the making of subjective identities.

Throughout the book, we shall highlight the need to engage with both *materialist* and *post-structuralist* approaches, in order to generate more comprehensive accounts of gender relations. We argue that rather than hold up a 'straw wo/man' to argue against, there is a need for approaches to be considered as a critical synthesis that brings together feminist frameworks with that of studies of masculinity. *Gender, Culture and Society* provides an

authoritative profile and critique of recent developments in sociological and cultural theories of gender relations. As we demonstrate, this is a complex area, increasingly conscious of the complicated relationship between theoretical frameworks, methodological strategies and the phenomena subject to examination. It is important to hold these relationships in a critical synthesis which seeks to preserve a materialist core from earlier feminist accounts focusing upon patriarchal relations, while incorporating insights from more recent reflection on representation, identity and cultural difference with reference to women's and men's social experiences. In other words, notions of what are referred to as decentred forms of performing genders and hybrid (mixing of) sexualities are being constituted within a wider arena of late modernity, which in turn they are helping to shape (Jameson, 1991). From the theoretical investigation emerges an evaluation of past understandings and analysis of implications for contemporary political practice. In social relations, people occupy certain positions simultaneously. We need to think about not the ways social categories accumulate but the ways that they inflect. When we talk about the notion of power, we have to think about it relationally, thinking about powerful in relation to whom. In this way, we do not look at power as an either/or division but as being much more relational. We can say power is shaped relationally: one group is both powerful and powerless.

## **Understanding Social and Cultural Change: The Collective Political Subject and Pluralized Identities**

The final aim of this book is to preface our discussion of social change and gender relations by highlighting the importance of the political context of gender and social change. Throughout *Gender, Culture and Society*, sociological literatures on gender and sexuality reveal highly divergent theoretical and conceptual positions that have been adopted across western societies, within the context of rapid social and cultural transformations. However, even within such a context of rapidly shifting explanations, the representation of sexual politics appears as an intensely contested terrain. The last two decades have seen unprecedented transformations in social relations of gender across Britain, much of Europe and the United States. For example, Phillips (1998a: 1) in her edited collection *Feminism and Politics*, writes of these:

transformations that can be measured in the global feminization of the workforce, the rapid equalization between the two sexes (at least in richer

countries) in educational participation and qualifications, and a marked increase in women's self-confidence and self-esteem that is probably the most lasting legacy of the contemporary women's movement.

Segal (1999: 203), while acknowledging such changes, notes the continuities of sexual divisions, including women's average earnings being less than that of men's throughout the world; women having less leisure time than men, with housework and childcare still the primary responsibility of women and the increased reporting of men's violence against women and children since the mid-1980s, while conviction rates have decreased. Segal raises the question about these 'radically contrasting configurations', suggesting that how we respond politically depends upon which feminist position we take up (p. 5).

By the early 2000s, with an intensified awareness of how we live with difference, and the identification of various interconnecting forms of sexual politics marked by fusions, hybridity and body ambiguities, we might add, or which other political positions we take up, for example, those emanating from men's studies or queer activism. The former projects *a crisis masculinity* across western contemporary societies that is marked by bitter debates about the assumed changing social location of men and accompanying threatened male subjectivities (see Kimmel and Messner, 1989). The latter's antiassimilation stance suggests a reconceptualization of what we understand by the political. This involves a shift away from challenging structural inequalities and power relations between relatively given or fixed sexual/gender categories to deconstructing the categories themselves – 'their fixity, separateness or boundedness' and a move 'towards seeing the play of power as less binary and less uni-directional' (Epstein and Johnson, 1998: 38). At the same time, such a move sensitizes us to the tension between the mobilization of the collective political subject (for example, women, gays/lesbians, black community) and the pluralization of identities. The latter involves processes of fragmentation and dislocation of femininities and masculinities within the contexts of different geographies and histories of change at the local level of the nation or state (Hall, 1992; Mac an Ghail, 1999). A post-colonial framework suggests that within the changing morphology of western urban sites, new identities are being manufactured, marked by diaspora (movement of people – dispersal), hybridity (mixing of cultures) and syncretism (pluralistic forms of cultural belonging) (Bhabha, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Spivak, 1988a, b). Reading through the above texts makes clear the need to engage with these more sophisticated theoretical frameworks that belies easy political categorization. At the same time, they remind us that a political understanding of this field of inquiry is not simply an empirical question. As we argue throughout this book, specific conceptual and methodological limitations emanate from

the undertheorization of social and cultural change. In turn, there is a difficulty in exploring the question of sexual politics at local and global levels. For Mohanty (1992), writing of the shift from the politics of transcendence to a politics of engagement, deploying non-western, cross-cultural studies serves to illustrate other potential ways of making sense of shifting gender structures, identities and practices.

Within a British context, a main political success of New Right (neo-liberal) dominance in Britain in the late 1980s was to challenge critical sociological accounts, taking up and reworking radical sociological critiques of society. These were seen by many people as making sense of their lives that were shaped by broader national anxieties and political concerns of 'new times'; that is, social transformations that mark a break with an older social order. As Hall (1988: 49) suggests in his analysis of Thatcherism, it successfully constituted 'new subject positions from which its discourses about the world make sense'. He adds that it:

combines ideological elements into a discursive chain in such a way that the logic or unity of the discourse depends on the subject addressed assuming a number of subject positions. The discourse can only be read or spoken unproblematically if it is enunciated from the imaginary position of knowledge of the self-reliant, self-interested, self-sufficient tax-payer – Possessive Individual Man; or the 'concerned patriot' or the subject passionately attached to individual liberty and passionately opposed to the incursion of liberty that occurs through the state; or the respectable housewife; or the native Britain.

In other words, the New Right promoted itself as constructing a modern Britain, with a radical agenda that gained the ascendancy, occupying the high moral ground with its projected atavistic accounts of a consumer-based acquisitive individualism, the patriarchal family, the strong state and the patriotic British nation. The response of the mainstream Left to the New Right's (neo-liberalism) modernizing project was to restate 'old times' Enlightenment-based principles, involving vague conceptions of a social-democratic, welfarist and multiethnic citizenship. This included the suggested return to notions of community, participatory democracy and the more recent additions of empowerment and the learning society. During this period, a self-fulfilling prophecy appeared to have captured English society, with its claim that there was no real alternative to the New Right's policies. Consequently, by the early 2000s, the mainstream British Left's response can be seen to be uncomfortably accommodating the Right's radical version of 'new times'. As Williams (2003: 25) points out:

The vocabulary of choice and opportunity, of social market type justice and diversity for all, spread from the Conservatives to the SDP [Social

Democratic Party] and then infused Labour's notions of a joined-up party with a consensus across the political spectrum.

Simultaneously, the bigger picture suggests that currently the political hegemony of the US neo-conservative project is attempting globally to become all-pervasive. Luttwak (1998: 27) captures the ideological power of the shift from a post-war, state-regulated capitalism to what he refers to as turbo-capitalism. Referring to contemporary advocates of the free-market, he writes:

What they celebrate, preach and demand is private enterprise liberated from government regulation, unchecked by effective trade unions, unfettered by sentimental concerns over the fate of employees or communities, and molested as little as possible by taxation. What they insistently demand is the privatization of state-owned business of all kinds, and the conversion of public institutions, from universities and botanic gardens to prisons, from libraries and schools to old people's homes, into private enterprises run for profit. What they promise is a more dynamic economy that will generate new wealth, while saying nothing about the distribution of any wealth, old or new.

In contrast to the political convergence between the parliamentary Right and Left in Britain, over the last 30 years, radical alternative agendas have been developed by New Social Movements, such as feminism, gay and lesbian liberation and antiracism, producing new political subjects that challenged this hegemonic socially conservative position. A significant development in the social sciences has been the impact of New Social Movements that have generated shifts in critically rethinking how we understand social institutions and cultural arenas, such as workplace, family life, education and leisure activities. By the early 2000s, questions of culture, identity and representation have moved centre stage. This shift enables us to explore the different theoretical frameworks made available by New Social Movements, namely *identity politics* and *the new politics of cultural difference*, which are two of the most dynamic contributions to current debates. (These distinctions are further explored in ch. 9). In this text, a *materialist* position is taken as underpinning a *politics of identity* and a *post-structuralist* position as underpinning *the new politics of cultural difference* (see above). Working within this framework highlights the need to connect an understanding of sexual politics, recent mobilizations and a sense of intimate belonging *with* wider social and cultural transformations as mutually constitutive. It is within this context of a complex politics of location that *Gender, Culture and Society* is placed, exploring the extent and direction of change in relation to the social relations of gender, sex/gender identity formations and subjectivities.

## **Structure of the Book**

Thus, this book is written in order to provide a critical examination of old and new questions: What is gender? How does it differ from our understanding of natural sex differences? How are gender relations and power related? Have women's lives been transformed? How is gender linked to bodies? How are we to understand the globalization of gender formations? Is there a crisis in masculinity? What does it mean to talk about post-feminism? These questions have been answered by a growing number of popular and academic texts. Given the prevalence of gender as a cultural flashpoint, in currently making sense of our lives, we have been selective in the areas that are being examined. Areas of violence, health and crime have received much attention. In contrast, gender and social change remain relatively under-explored in the context of globalization and generation. Alongside this, the social and cultural arenas on which we have focused are those areas that reflect our own academic and intellectual biographies, which include areas such as sexuality, politics and the media.

Chapter 1, 'Approaching Gender: Feminism, Men's Studies and the Cultural Turn,' examines the main sociological and cultural studies approaches to understanding men and women within the broader context of social change. We provide a systematic overview of the field in an attempt to produce a synthesis of main approaches to gender. For example, there is a critical presentation of a wide range of theories, including sex-role theory, second-wave feminism and post-feminism, alongside approaches that draw upon post-structuralism. In doing so, it draws out the major theoretical, analytical and methodological tensions that characterize contemporary approaches to understanding masculinities and femininities. These tensions provide the major themes that will be explored throughout the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, 'Fragmenting Family Life: Beyond Maternal Femininities and Paternal Masculinities,' we explore the issue of representations of familial femininity and masculinity and women's and men's participation in the domestic arena. Beginning with a socio-historical approach, it explores earlier feminist work on the sociology of the family – emphasizing the need to see gender as primarily not a property of individuals but rather a consequence of institutions and cultural practices – from a position of recent social and cultural theory. It is suggested that earlier studies tend to understand mothers and fathers as asymmetrically positioned within absent/present, powerless/powerful, good/bad typologies. Within the context of the changing family, recent years have seen ever-increasing research and writing on men's experience of families and the personal, social and political representations of those experiences. This work, moving beyond a 'mother focused' paradigm, has addressed traditional

typologies by understanding mothers and fathers as occupying, at the same time, contradictory social and emotional subject positions. The latter approach provides an analytical framework that brings together multiple levels of mothers' and fathers' experiences, and conceptualizes motherhood and fatherhood as a multi-faceted lived out experience of classed, racialized and generationally located dynamics. Finally, by re-examining the gendering of parenting we might begin to sketch out changing sex/gender relations in this arena and begin to re-imagine future possibilities of fragmenting family life.

Chapter 3, 'In and Out of Labour: Beyond the Cult of Domesticity and Breadwinners,' highlights that the shift from an industrial to a service-based economy in western capitalist countries has been marked by an experience of collapse, fragmentation and contraction. In the light of these changes and the suggested major transformation, we map men's and women's employment patterns within the context of the pervasive talk about a *crisis of masculinity*. Indeed, recent accounts have argued that a changing gendered division of labour has blurred traditional modernist understandings of men and women as homemakers and breadwinners. This chapter explores this assumption by examining recent quantitative data to highlight how the relationship between men, women and work has altered. The chapter further explores the suggested changing nature of gender relations, emerging occupational identities and the accompanying production of work-based subjects by examining a range of contemporary explanatory frameworks. These include political economy, structuration theory and theories of reflexive and aesthetic modernity. The latter, late modernity theorists often emphasize the current reconfiguration of the social division of labour and the reorganization of the gendered meaning of work. In contrast, critics maintain that we are a long way from the spatial containment of the cult of (female) domesticity and (male) breadwinners that earlier feminists identified as of central importance to the social reproduction of western industrial societies. In other words, a narrative of 'nothing but the same old story', it is claimed, remains in place.

Chapter 4, 'Interplaying Gender and Age in Late Modernity,' notes that although gender has become an established theme of young people's agency and cultural creativity (Griffin, 1993; McRobbie, 1991), there is a need for a broader analysis that develops the interrelationship between masculinities and femininities and age-related categories. For instance, gender theorists tend to unproblematically apply (adult) notions of masculinities and femininities to children and young people and use such concepts to explain experience and behaviours. Gender itself is often considered the exclusive study of men and women; children, teenagers and older people tend to be excluded or appended to 'real' theorizing. Informed by recent developments in the sociology of childhood and older

age, this chapter provides existing gender theories with new ways to understand the age dynamics of masculinities and femininities. The chapter first considers how studies of masculinity in the context of schooling reveal limitations of how gender and age tend to be connected. The chapter then turns to examine the formation of femininity in the context of older age with particular reference to menopause. Finally, the chapter considers older men and how categories of age and sexuality converge to produce possibilities of ageing.

Chapter 5, 'Shifting Gender Connections: Sexuality, Late Modernity and Lifestyle Sex,' recognizes how in late modernity increasing importance is attached to gender and sexuality as a modern resource for demonstrating *who we are, what we are* and *who we might become*. It is suggested that, at a time of multiple social disruptions, including the diversification of family life, uncertainty in the sphere of employment and distrust in established public institutions, the connections between gender and sexuality are becoming more problematic. In this chapter, we address the intimate relationship between gender and sexuality and more specifically focus on rethinking this couplet within the context of transformations in sexual lives. The chapter begins by exploring the interrelationships between sexuality and gender from feminist and queer theory positions. These discussions are then contextualized by introducing the notion of the confessional society. We suggest that this has had a crucial impact on how the interrelationships between gender and sexuality are being forged. The chapter goes on to explore these connections in relation to emerging communication interfaces, sex tourism and media construction of gendered sexualities.

Chapter 6, 'Representing Engendered Bodies: Producing the Cultural Categories "Men" and "Women",' explores the diversity of work within western cultures arguing for the central location of the corporeal (the body) in the making of gender relations and sexual desire. For Connell (2000), gender is the way bodies are drawn into history; bodies, rather than being seen as determining patterns of masculinity and femininity as biological essentialists and popular psychology would suggest, are arenas for the making of gender relations. Women's bodies were a major subject of research in earlier feminist work, which was very successful in constructing a new explanatory vocabulary, in which they named men's social practices across a number of sites – the state, medicine, family life and cultural technologies – as instituting and reproducing control and exploitation of women's bodies as the locus of relations of ruling and the accompanying masculinist power (Smith, 1987). Most significantly, the scale of men's violence – within the home, on the street, within sporting arenas, inside public institutions and imperial military activities – called into question what we understood by normal masculinity (Dworkin, 1981; Hanmer and Maynard, 1987). While holding onto the continuing significance of these

accounts of materialist patriarchal domination, the chapter also addresses more recent work on the body that has developed a range of productive and controversial concepts: sexed embodiment, performativity, heteronormativity, gender transgression and the third sex (Diprose, 1994; Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 1999). Simultaneously, masculinity theorists in exploring the media-led gaze on male bodily practices – technologies of looking – as spectacular performance, in response to the global fragmentation of social relations, read this new cultural trend in alternative ways. For some, it is evidence of the discursive emergence of the new (heterosexual) man. For others, it indicates the stabilization of the existing hegemonic sex/gender order. As a result, the chapter is located within the main current conceptual tensions and confusions in this field of inquiry.

Chapter 7, 'Media Masculinities and Femininities: Sporting Genders,' reviews contemporary representations of masculinities and femininities that are being made available by media technologies. Previous work on the gendered nature of these cultural technologies has established the systematic patterns of women's cultural invisibility. While assuming a passive homogeneous audience, it has tended to underplay the complex processes of popular culture, in which textual and visual meanings are produced in diverse social contexts, marked by differentiation, diversity and ambiguity. Importantly, this chapter focuses on sport and considers how masculinity and femininity are mediated by media technologies that do not convey gender but are integral to its constitution. It highlights the structural inequalities that pervade the representation of gender in the media. Alongside this, it draws attention to how such representations convey only part of the story. While engaging with the structuring of the visibility of particular femininities and masculinities, it also explores how media reporting of sport might offer alternative views of gender and sport. More specifically, it highlights how the media in the context of sport might offer new possibilities of understanding and experiencing gender relations.

Chapter 8, 'Men and Women of the World: Emerging Representations of Global Gender Relations' addresses questions that have tended to be underplayed in sociological and cultural studies texts – that of global gender relations. It begins by problematizing what gender in a global context of the development of extensive worldwide patterns of cultural, social and economic relationships across nations means. It highlights a broader concern with establishing the question of when does something become gendered. A key aspect of this chapter is the notion of cultural imperialism. There is an argument that contemporary gender relations are being produced by a hegemony that is cultivating dominant versions of masculinity and femininity. Such versions are being distributed through a range of cultural products. Cultural products are not simply reducible to consumer goods, but may also include notions of health care, education and politics.

This chapter focuses on the cultural imperialism thesis, first by demonstrating how global forces are calibrating local genders to match global forms. Second, the chapter then deconstructs this view by examining how local inflections of gender recontextualize global cultural forms. The chapter concludes by drawing upon a case study, based on our empirical work that examines the interplay between global forces, gender and ethnicity.

Chapter 9, 'Gender on the Move: The Search for a New Sex/Gender Order in Late Modernity,' explores how the central categories in the field of gender studies as unstable constructions have been constantly contested with new meanings emerging in relation to socio-economic, cultural and political transformations. Most significantly, theorists have established the dynamic presence of gendered inequalities and sexual difference, which in turn are central to the constitution of political understandings of these wider transformations. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the politics of femininity and masculinity, we locate the changing accounts of the complex interrelations between sex, gender and sexuality within the long history of sexual politics to the recent focus upon sexual citizenship (Richardson, 2000). From a contemporary perspective of talk about post-feminism, masculine backlash and new men's movements in western societies, the history of sexual politics includes the new social movements of second-wave feminism and its discontents, gay and lesbian mobilization, men's groups' protests, gendered ethnic and national visibility, transgendered voices and the more recent cultural projects such as HIV/AIDS activism and queer interventions (Bryson, 1999). In turn, this puts us in a position to explore the question of the future of sexual politics at local and global levels, using non-western, cross-cultural studies to illustrate other potential ways of making sense of shifting gender structures, identities and practices.

The last chapter, 'Conclusion', provides a brief summary of the main themes of the book by reengaging the aims that were set out above. We hope that this results in a clearer picture of some of the crucial questions and tensions that need to be addressed by future work in this area.

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