

2

Gender and Modernity

I have argued that the academic use of the term ‘gender’ was politically informed, having been developed in tandem with the activities of the feminist movement which sought equality between women and men. Extending this analysis, we can also state that the development of theorization about gender, like any other social science concept (Weber 1949), is shaped by the political and intellectual contexts of the time. In this and the next chapter I shall be examining two intellectual ‘moments’ which have strongly influenced the way thinking about gender within social sciences has evolved. The shorthand terms for these moments are *modernity* and *postmodernity*. This chapter gives a brief overview of the way theories of gender developed in the intellectual epoch sociologists currently characterize as modernity.

The politics of modernity

As stated before, the interest in gender spread in the 1970s as part of the second-wave feminist movement. But it was also influenced by other events which formed its context. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed in Britain a major expansion of higher education, which brought a new kind of young person first into the body of students and then into jobs as lecturers

and teachers. Many young people from working-class backgrounds were the first members of their families to go to university; far more women were going into higher education, instead of into secretarial college, finishing school or straight into work. This new generation of young people with university experience started to challenge academic and political orthodoxies. Many were swept up into the mass protests against the American war in Vietnam (the 1960s equivalent of Iraq) and subsequently into broader movements calling for greater democracy within and outwith the universities. They marched, demonstrated and occupied buildings, and in Paris their counterparts ripped up paving stones and took control of areas of the city. In the United States, four protesting students were shot dead and several others injured by the National Guard at Kent State University in Ohio. Others were more attracted by the cultural movement known by its adherents as the 'alternative' or 'counter-culture', whose members were popularly characterized as 'hippies' or 'drop-outs', and who pioneered new lifestyles based on communal living, drugs, sexual experimentation and 'psychedelic' music. All this ferment fed into the academic agenda, where Marxism and other radical approaches became the order of the day.

Marxism in particular appealed to the many young men from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds who had benefited from the expansion of mass education. This was the generation of radicals who included future politicians such as Jack Straw, a future Home Secretary, Peter Hain, known for his work on poverty and third world development before becoming an active adherent of New Labour, and David Triesman, General Secretary of the Labour Party in 2001–3 and now a member of the House of Lords. Bill Clinton confessed to sampling marijuana at Oxford, though he famously 'did not inhale'. Most, however, did! Many of these young radicals then moved to academic jobs in sociology and other social sciences.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Marxism was the nub of radical sociological thinking. It was debated and analysed even by those who rejected it, such as Frank Parkin in his critical text *Marxism and Class Theory* (1979), which set out an alternative form of class analysis drawing on the work of Max Weber. It is not surprising that feminists developed their

account of gender inequality in response to ideas about class and capitalism. An approach variously known as Marxist feminism or materialist feminism became one of the major theoretical perspectives in the second-wave study of feminism. In Britain, its major early exponents included Michelle Barrett, Veronica Beechey and Miriam Glucksmann. In America, the work of Heidi Hartmann and Iris Young was especially important. Christine Delphy was an influential French contributor.

Marxist feminist thought took many forms, engendered many debates and still helps shape the analysis of gender. In later chapters we will look at the work of Miriam Glucksmann, which deals with the 'total social organization of labour', a new way of developing some of Marx's ideas. However, it is not my intention here to enter into a discussion of the details of this wealth of literature. Readers will find useful accounts of these theoretical debates in Barrett (1980), Marshall (1994) and Tong (1989), among others. Here, I shall focus on the general way in which the Marxist feminists understood gender and utilized it for analysis.

Marxism, feminism and gender

For the Marxist feminists of the 1970s, gender was viewed primarily as a system of inequality and oppression. In this it was analogous to one of the key concepts of Marxist sociology: class. Class was seen as a relation of inherent exploitation between, in capitalist societies, the property-owning capitalists or bourgeoisie and the propertyless proletariat or working class, who were forced to sell their labour to capitalist employers to survive. This relationship, by which labour power (capacity to labour) is appropriated by the bourgeoisie and used to generate a profit, is what Marx conceptualized as 'exploitation' and is the kernel of Marxist class theory. The stress on property at a time (the mid-nineteenth century) when married women in Britain had no entitlement to their own wealth or income led Marx's collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1972), to claim that in the family 'the man was the bourgeois and the woman the proletariat'. Within the patriarchal family

40 Gender and Modernity

system, in which the man had absolute rights over his wife and children, he appropriated the labour of female members to cook, clean and sew. This was the basis, for Engels, of gender oppression. Engels also believed that the route to equality for women was through wage labour, which would free them from dependence on fathers and husbands and from unpaid virtual 'slave' labour in the home.

Things obviously have altered vastly since Engels wrote *The Origin of the Family* in 1884, not least because of the passing of a number of pieces of legislation which gave rights to women. The Married Women's Property Act of 1882 brought a potential end to the propertyless status of wives by allowing them rights to retain and keep their own property separate. However, it is interesting to reflect that in societies where women do not have the right to work, as in certain parts of Arabia and Asia, Engels's analysis may still apply. Paid work outside the home, offering both the right to enter the public sphere and the ability to acquire an independent source of income, may start to challenge the patriarchal dominance of husband, brothers or father. Indeed, Bhachu's research on Sikhs in Britain (1991) revealed that, when young women started to be involved in paid work, it had an immediate effect on the domestic arrangement of the family, with women gaining more freedom of choice.

While Engels's work drew attention to the family as the main site of women's oppression, the analysis of the Marxist feminists of the second wave was centred on the sphere of production. This was because of the centrality in Marxist theory of the concepts of labour (the work of production and social reproduction) and labour power (the capacity to labour). The ability of capitalists to squeeze the worker into producing more goods for the same payment (what we now call 'work intensification') is what enables them to produce profits. Thus, a major concern of Marxist feminism was to study the *labour* and *labour power* of women, how it was employed, where it was employed and how it differed from that of men. This led to theoretical debates about the lower value put on women's labour and about how domestic labour performed by women contributed to the maintenance of the capitalist system. Empirically, the earliest research studies by UK feminists tended to focus on women's work, either as

wage labour (for example, Sally Westwood's study of hosiery workers (1984) and Anna Pollert's (1981) account of women in a tobacco factory) or as domestic labour and carers (Ann Oakley's pioneering text *Housewife* (1974) or Pauline Hunt's study of gender and class consciousness within families (1980)).

The strategy of Marxist feminists in approaching gender was to see it as a system of oppressive relations and view it in relation to capitalism. Sometimes this meant developing theories of how gender relations fitted within capitalist social organization; sometimes it involved the elaboration of a parallel system, often referred to as *patriarchy*, which coexisted with and interlocked with capitalism. This was the popular 'dual systems theory' which was elaborated, for example, by Hartmann (1986) and Walby (1986; 1990). Gender relations, in this view, were a form of inequality and oppression parallel with class, though, as in the case of class, such inequalities could be removed by the institution of a truly socialist regime.

I have concentrated on Marxism here because it exemplifies well the structure of thinking which we know as 'modernism'. This has its ancestry in the Enlightenment era of the late eighteenth century. The hallmark of the Enlightenment was its view of human reason as a key instrument by which the problems of society could be understood, tackled and ameliorated. The power of reason would shed light on darkness and enable mankind to progress towards better, more just and orderly social forms and institutions. Human nature, too, could be trained and developed to enable people to live more nobly and harmoniously with their fellows, according to the doctrine known as *the perfectibility of man*. As compared to the previous era of thinking, which was heavily theological in tenor and tended to explain events in terms of the 'will of God' (think of the Muslim view of life and the mantra, *inshallah*), there was a strongly secular and humanistic impulse to Enlightenment thought. Enlightenment ideas heavily influenced the evolution of sociology, early sociologists such as Comte, St Simon, Mill and Spencer being leading lights of the movement. Their legacy was inherited by Marx, Weber and Durkheim, the 'Big Three' contributors to the development of sociology in its classic manifestation. They shared the humanistic belief that understanding the world could lead to social

change. All provided evolutionary accounts of social development, historical typologies of society and, in the case of Marx and Durkheim, accounts of how societies might progress towards justice and democracy. This optimistic, almost Utopian, strand was not shared by the more sceptical Max Weber, whose visions of the future presaged oppressive and bureaucratic totalitarian states. Nevertheless, he shared with the other two the idea that societies were orderly and logical enough for a future to be deduced from understanding the present. It is that view of societies as logically ordered, regular structures which characterizes modernist theory and which was to be challenged by postmodern and post-structuralist thinkers such as Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida (see chapter 3). In the case of Marx and Durkheim, the idea of 'regular structures' or 'patterns of behaviour' was extended further, developing the image of society as a 'system' in which each part contributed to the coherent functioning of the whole.

The modernist thinkers gave scant attention to gender, as is indicated by the usage of terms like 'mankind' and 'man' in the preceding paragraph. This was a typical feature of the vocabulary of the Enlightenment. However, it can be argued that feminism was also an inevitable product of Enlightenment and modernism. Enlightenment concern over 'the rights of man' pointed inexorably to the question 'and what about women?'. Enlightenment thinkers John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft wrote about the rights of women. As liberalism emerged in the nineteenth century as the most popular version of modernist political thought, it was almost impossible for those committed to freedom and individuality not to turn to the plight of women, whose social status was seen by the liberal feminists of the mid-nineteenth century as being analogous to that of the slaves the liberals were so keen to free. Thus, as political theorist Diana Coole argues (1998), the 'liberation of women' can be seen as an ideal inherent within liberalism and so a product of the Enlightenment project and modernist emancipatory ideas. This of course fits with the tendency in modernist thinking to see a positive movement in social evolution ('progress') towards a better society founded upon reason. In the feminist ideal this would be a society where women and men would be equal partners, to the benefit of both sexes.

Wollstonecraft's work (1775 [1792]) is particularly interesting, since she argued that being deprived of rights and, consequently, being dependent on men led to a kind of deformation in the human potential of women, especially those from the privileged classes. They were forced to adopt a personality of being docile, innocent, sexually passive, obedient and soft, immersed in trivial and frivolous activities designed to make them attractive to men. Finding a husband was the be-all and end-all for such women, reflecting the quotation from Byron: 'Men's love is of men's life a thing apart; 'tis women's whole existence'. This is a powerful early example of a sociological account of the construction of gender identity. Men, too, lose out in this process, as these limited, charming, childlike women cannot be equal intellectual companions in their lives. A gripping dramatization of these gendered processes is played out in George Eliot's great novel *Middlemarch*. The heroic and attractive Dr Lydgate, whom the reader immediately identifies as a fitting mate for the highly intelligent Dorothea Brooke, is in fact enraptured by the pretty but shallow Rosamond Vincy. Eliot painfully portrays his growing disillusionment and bitter realization that Rosamond's superficiality prevents her from reciprocating his passionate emotional engagement and that she cares for little beyond clothing, appearance and consumption (a kind of nineteenth-century footballer's wife!). Dorothea, the enlightened woman (reflecting some elements of George Eliot herself), is the one who cares about poverty, progress and human well-being; but she is herself trapped in a sterile marriage with the dusty academic Edward Casaubon. While she yearns to engage with his intellectual work, he will only treat her as a kind of filing clerk.

Modernism and the second wave

The modes of thinking characteristic of modernism were dominant when second-wave feminism developed in the 1970s and early 1980s. Thus, feminists took on the idea of societies as orderly systems, whose structures could be studied and analysed by a mixture of empirical study and conceptual

logic. Feminist academic work involved building models of gender oppression and inequality, along with the accumulation of research studies showing how life experience was differentiated by gender and how these differences were the basis of gender inequality and gender disadvantage.

As I have stated, in Britain much of this second-wave research and theory was informed by Marxist ideas. However, there are other approaches associated with the modernist stance in gender analysis. It was common during the 1980s and 1990s to group these approaches into three broad perspectives: Marxist/materialist feminism; radical feminism; and liberal or equal rights feminism. Subsequently, commentators pointed out that these categories were rather crude and that it is often not possible to fit any writer or any text neatly into one of these three boxes (see Barrett and Phillips 1992; Bryson 1999; Tong 1989). This is quite correct: many scholars drew ideas from all three approaches. For example, as we shall see, the work of Sylvia Walby synthesizes many ideas characteristically associated with each perspective. And how would one ever pigeonhole the groundbreaking and influential studies of Ann Oakley? Nonetheless, if we see this threefold classification as an example of Weberian ‘ideal types’, models by which to benchmark actual phenomena, then I think the typology is worth preserving, as each identified approach does display a distinct ‘take’ on gender.

As we saw above, Marxist feminists saw gender as a relationship of oppression, but one which depended on what Marxists saw as the primary basis of social inequality, the economic relations of class. By contrast, the radical perspective, which Bryson (1999) usefully labels ‘woman-centred’, saw gender as the primal source of social inequality, going right back to the simplest tribal societies, from which all other forms of social inequality derived. The sexual division of labour predated any form of class division. Nor did the radicals see production alone as the main site of gender difference: reproductive relations, the family and sexuality were the starting point for male domination over women. While this has some resemblance to Engels’ arguments, radical feminists did not see paid employment as a simple route away from gender oppression, because the family was not conceived in the materialist framework of labour and labour power alone. Violent,

physical and emotional, aspects of gender relations were highlighted as well, for example in Shulamith Firestone's challenging and anxiety-provoking statement 'love . . . is the pivot of women's oppression today' (Firestone 1971: 142). Firestone argued that until the nuclear family was abolished, or at the least drastically reconfigured, women would remain in thrall to men. Women's role as child-bearers and rearers forced them into dependency on men, especially during the gestation period. Radical feminists also focused very strongly on the widespread nature of sexual violence, from wife-killing and rape, to sexual harassment and sexist labels for women (Wilson 1982; Brownmiller 1975). This focus meant that radical feminists were often caricatured as 'man-haters'.

The radical approach to gender was most influential in the United States, where, because of the strength of commitment to capitalism as the fulfilment of the 'American Dream', Marxist thinking was less respectable within academia. It also found favour in the social democracies of Scandinavia, where class inequalities were less severe, but where gender segregation was still marked. Among its best-known practitioners, who tended to combine research and public activism, were Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Dale Spender and Germaine Greer.

These writers and those influenced by them pushed into new areas which had been less important to the materialists, such as rape, domestic violence and pornography. Activism around these issues was a major part of second-wave achievement, with the setting up of organizations such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis Centres. These became a crucial part of the 'gender agenda' hitherto hardly acknowledged. Another major issue highlighted by Spender (1985) was the gendering of language: 'made by men', it did not contain words for women to express their emotions or speak of sex-specific experience. Vernacular words for sexual intercourse, for example, describe the act from the point of view of the penetrative male: banging, shafting, screwing, poking, fucking. Within the tyranny of this phallogentric language, women can only read the universe through the male gaze. Mary Daly (1978) attempted to rectify this by developing a new 'gynocentric' language, drawing on the long tradition of women's spirituality and mysticism. In a strategy later utilized within

Queer Theory, pejorative words used about women – witch, bitch, hag, shrew – were reappropriated to express female values, strengths and power.

Beyond the activist contribution, however, perhaps the most abiding influence of the radical or woman-centred approach was its development of the concept of patriarchy, exemplified in Kate Millett's ground-breaking *Sexual Politics* (1971). Patriarchy was described by Millett as a system of male domination over women that was embedded in all the institutions of modern society. Through the structures of patriarchy, men held power over women and devalued their social activities and contributions. Not only were social institutions such as families, schools, churches and work organizations seen as patriarchal, but, as Spender and Daly were to emphasize, the very structures of language, ideas and thought were also shaped by men: they were 'phallogentric'. This is what became known as the 'malestream', which was to be challenged persistently by feminist academics. Heterosexual normativity was also seen as a major mainstay of male power, suppressing a range of other possibilities for attachment and partnership (homosexuality, bisexuality, passionate friendships, celibacy), which were seen as potentially undermining patriarchal control.

Thus the thrust of the radical approach was to extend the analysis of gender beyond the realm of labour. However, it shared with Marxism some key distinguishing marks of modernist thinking: the portrayal of societies as structured, displaying patterned regularities of interaction; the assertion of gender as a central organizing principle of social life; a stress on the collective nature of human existence and of collectivities as the potential basis for political mobilization (be it class revolution or militant sisterhood); a belief that rational analysis could uncover the causes of oppression and thus be the basis of social reform; and an optimistic view of the future potential for equality and the 'just society'.

The two latter traits were shared with liberal feminism, or 'Equal Rights' feminism as Olive Banks (1981) called it in an influential text. However, this approach, with its roots way back in nineteenth-century liberalism discussed earlier in the chapter, differed from the other two perspectives in the way it conceptualized gender. Gender was not in this analysis a

feature of social structure or a system of oppressive relationships. For the liberal tendency, gender was a form of discrimination relating to ascribed biogenetic differences of the sexes. Indeed, 'the sexes' or 'the woman question', rather than 'gender', was the preferred terminology of the early women's rights activists. This discrimination was fostered by the behaviour of individuals, rather than being institutionally embedded. It arose from ignorance and prejudice (along with economic self-interest) and could be combated through education, political campaigning and legal reform. Valerie Bryson (1999) refers to it as 'common-sense' feminism, as it was much easier for non-academics to accept. Indeed, it has been labelled 'the acceptable face of feminism'. Indicatively, my first-year undergraduates have little difficulty in identifying with its tenets, while the structural approaches of Marxist and radical feminism are often perceived as 'over-stated', 'taking it a bit too far'. While critics of the position see its faith in the power of education and the law as naive and its analysis of gender as limited, we should not underestimate the power and scope of liberalism. Liberal activists have headed the fight for woman's rights and made headway in the political channels in western countries and, subsequently, internationally through institutions such as the United Nations, the Beijing Convention and the Commission for Human Rights.

As an adjunct to these feminist endeavours, Beasley's second subfield of Masculinity Studies can also be seen as growing from the modernist project. Like second-wave feminists, early contributors to the analysis of masculinity perceived the world as structured and orderly, as will be seen in the discussion of the work of Connell which follows. They, too, wanted to revisit the world through a gender lens. As Beasley (2005) points out, the major difference is that they were focusing on the dominant category, rather than the marginalized category of women. However, against the radical feminist view that men were the problem, masculinity theorists tended to see the structures of gender relations as oppressive to men as well as women, compelling them to conform to dominant ideals of masculinity. Gay men in particular were oppressed by the norm of heterosexuality, often being also victims of rape and male violence. As a result, some masculinity theorists were critical of the idea of patriarchy,

pointing out also that powerful women from the top echelons of society often exercised power over working-class men, as servants or employees. Others focused specifically on male bonding or ‘fratriarchy’ (rule of brothers) (Hearn 1992) showing how dominant forms of masculinity were shored up by patterns of male socializing which excluded women (and gay men).

Within social science theory the influence of modernist thinking remains powerful, despite the challenges of postmodernism which will be reviewed in the next chapter. The view of gender as a regular set of relations between men and women embedded into social structures and institutions informs social science research across a range of disciplines. Modernist feminist thinking was responsible for developing the concept of gender, bringing issues of gender disadvantage and inequity into the public arena and making it a central concern of the academic agenda. Gender and related concepts, such as patriarchy, gender segregation, domestic labour, domestic violence and heterosexual normativity, are now a respected part of the social science conceptual toolkit. To illustrate this, I will conclude this chapter with discussion of the work of two highly influential contributors to gender analysis – Sylvia Walby and Raewyn (formerly Robert) Connell – whose work exemplifies the strengths and interests of the modernist approach and is highly influential on the thinking of others.

Sylvia Walby and the theory of patriarchy

Walby’s work on gender has developed through a series of well-regarded books, *Patriarchy at Work* (1986), *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990) and *Gender Transformations* (1997), which have made her one of the best-known British feminist scholars. Bringing together elements of Marxist, radical and liberal feminism, she developed an account of patriarchy as a set of interlocking structures that perpetuate male dominance. These consist of paid work, the domestic division of labour, sexuality, the state and other institutions of civil society, especially culture and male violence. They combine to form a system of

patriarchal relations, which coexist and interact within a system of capitalist relations. Walby was thus a proponent of the 'dual systems' theory; that is, she did not visualize social order as a single interlocking system in which all the parts fitted together neatly. Rather, she argued that these two systems, although sometimes working together in harmony (for example, keeping women in low-paid jobs, as cheap labour serves to reinforce male superiority alongside capitalist profits), could also be in tension. For example, capitalism's tendency to suck women into the labour force, especially at times of labour shortage such as during the two world wars, was at odds with men's desire to keep women under their control by confining them to housework. By viewing these two 'systems' as connecting but not coterminous, Walby was able to allow both class and gender relations a degree of freedom to change independently of each other.

One criticism that has been persistently levelled at the concept of patriarchy is that it implies that men are always and everywhere dominant, allowing no room for alternative power relations between the sexes. Seeking to counter this, Walby developed an interesting account of a change in the nature of gendered power relations between the nineteenth and late twentieth century, speaking of a switch from 'private' to 'public' patriarchy. Private patriarchy involved the control of individual women by their menfolk within the family; their powerlessness in the private sphere was reinforced by the limited access permitted them to the public domains of employment, political activity and government. The twentieth century witnessed a gradual erosion of male domination in the family, as ideals of equality have been backed by legal reforms granting women entitlement to fair shares of family resources and strong parental rights by virtue of their maternal role. However, this has not brought true gender equality, as relations between men and women in the public sphere remain skewed. Men retain positions of power in authority within the labour market, in political and other institutions and in the majority of cultural and social institutions such as the arts and media, religious bodies and the military. Within these public arenas, women remained confined to subordinate and secondary roles, in a way which serves to proclaim the social superiority of men.

In *Gender Transformations*, Walby takes this analysis one stage further by abandoning the use of patriarchy and replacing it with the more open-ended concept of gender regime. She uses this term to illuminate recent shifts in gender relations in the post-war period. The gender regime of the early twentieth century was one in which women were socialized and trained to fulfil a domestic role. Their lives were focused around their potential as wives and mothers, so that employment was seen merely as a prelude to marriage (and indeed, in the 1930s many organizations operated a 'marriage bar', requiring women to leave when they got wed or when they had children). However, by the end of the twentieth century, the expectation that both partners in a couple should work, along with the opening up of higher education and a range of professional opportunities to women, had freed women from this domestic fate, allowing them to compete with men in the public sphere, if not on quite equal terms. In her current work, Walby is seeking to link this account of a changing gender regime to alterations in the nature of capitalism, as it moves to a phase of heightened global linkage and competition, accompanied in western societies by a switch away from manufacture and industrial production to service-based and knowledge-based forms of profit accumulation.

Walby's work can be criticized for being overly monolithic and not taking sufficient account of differences in the fortunes of different groups of women, but nevertheless the 'dual systems' approach may have paved the way for further exploration of the 'intersectionality' of the various forms of social division with gender (class, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation among others), while her account of 'gender transformations' refutes the claims of critics that the analysis of patriarchy is inherently ahistoric and insensitive to change.

Raewyn Connell: 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasized femininity'

The Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell is perhaps the best-known contemporary theorist of masculinity. Her ideas evolved as part of a movement to broaden out the work of

feminist scholars on gender by turning the attention to issues surrounding men and masculinity. What was at the time called 'the new men's studies' developed in the 1980s, as concerned men pointed out that, in the words of Terrell Carver (1996), 'gender is not a synonym for women'. While Connell has over the years drawn on a broad range of influences, including some of the ideas of postmodernism and post-structuralism, the core strategy, set out in *Gender and Power* (1987), was classically modernist. The book highlighted three sets of structures which produced inequalities of gender: the division of labour, power and cathexis. By the latter Connell meant the structure of feelings and emotions which is prevalent in society, especially in relation to sexual relationships. Historically, men had gained the upper hand in these three areas of social life: they held the top jobs and predominated in the best-paid and most highly respected occupations; they had a virtual monopoly of decision-making positions, and 'men in suits' ('male, pale and stale') occupied a majority of top political posts, as well as other positions of authority and leadership; they had set the rules of sexual engagement in a way that made women emotionally dependent upon them.

Like Walby, Connell offered a strongly structural account of gender. She suggested that these three interlinked structures came together to produce particular 'gender orders' or 'gender regimes'. However, s/he emphasized very strongly that these should not be seen as any kind of fixed and inexorable system. In this sense, the discussion of the structures of a gender order or regime is different from the Marxian analysis of the capitalist system, in which the economic base (made up of relations of production and forces of production) determines all the rest of society (the 'superstructure'). As Connell states, in none of these three sets of structures 'is there an ultimate determinant, a "generative nucleus" from which the rest of the pattern of gender relations springs' (1987: 116).

This is important, because, as we shall see, one of the major criticisms aimed by postmodernists at modernist thinking was its deterministic nature. Postmodernists reject all approaches which suggest that society is built upon a specified foundation, from which all other facets of social life can be deduced; and they particularly rebut the metaphor of societies as 'system', since this implies the idea of closure. In a system,

the parts work together to produce a functioning whole and new elements cannot easily be introduced into it without disrupting the functioning. Thus the notion of a 'social system' is difficult to combine with an idea of social relations as fluid and changing. What both Walby and Connell have tried to do is produce a version of structure which is flexible and allows for change.

Concerned not to develop a monolithic account of gender interactions, Connell is renowned for having developed the idea of a number of different forms of masculinity and femininity, different ways of being a man or a woman, and, in addition, that these plural gender identities were framed in relation to *hegemonic masculinity*. By this Connell meant the most widely accepted form of being a man in any given society. In the contemporary context, this is the form of masculinity we refer to as 'macho': tough, competitive, self-reliant, controlling, aggressive and fiercely heterosexual. Connell states that 'hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women' (1987: 183). Subordinated forms of masculinity could include homosexuality, ethnically differentiated masculinities and the more empathetic and softer forms of heterosexual masculinity such as the 'New Man' (see the vignette that follows this chapter). While Connell believes that there is no single form of femininity which is dominant, she speaks of 'emphasized femininity', which is the counterpoint of hegemonic masculinity, defined by its oppositeness to the masculine: emphasized femininity is soft, submissive, sexually coy, alluring or flirtatious, concerned with domesticity and preoccupied with bodily appearance (similar to the deformed female personality described by Wollstonecraft). As discussed earlier, this is the form of gender relations which poses the sexes as 'opposite'. To be a man is to be 'not-like-a-woman', to be a woman is to be 'not-like-a-man'.

The strength of Connell's work, it seems to me, is that, like Walby's work, it offers a strong set of propositions, or models of gender relations, against which to test and match our own understandings of the world, with which we can agree or disagree. Both authors offer a view of gender relations as historically specific and changing. Both avoid a deterministic

account of gender, while suggesting what the most important sites of gendered inequalities are. Both provide an explanatory framework for male dominance, but one that does not preclude the recognition of shifts in the balance of power. Connell's view of plural masculinities informs the vignette that follows, discussing contemporary ways of being a man. After that, in chapter 3, I shall turn to the new approaches to the study of gender which gained prominence in the 1990s and challenged the legitimacy of thought based on the traditions of the Enlightenment: post-structuralism and postmodernism.