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## Sexual Character

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### Unitary Models and Sex Difference Research

The most common conception of the psychology of gender is that women and men as groups have different traits: different temperaments, characters, outlooks and opinions, abilities, even whole structures of personality. There is no accepted term for this concept; I will call it 'sexual character'. The analogy is with David Riesman's term 'social character'; 'sexual' is more apt than 'gender' since in most usages the idea is specifically linked with sex.

Often it is assumed that there is just one set of traits that characterizes men in general and thus defines masculinity. Likewise there is one set of traits for women, which defines femininity. This unitary model of sexual character is a familiar part of sexual ideology. It can be quite explicit: 'just like a woman', 'just like a man'. More often it is implicit. Jokes against 'women drivers', or the 'Mere Male' column in the women's magazine *New Idea*, work by calling into play shared assumptions of this kind: that women are hopeless with cars, that men are hopeless around the house.

More sophisticated, but logically similar, ideas appear in academic writing. In Talcott Parson's classic work 'instrumental' versus 'expressive' traits are supposed to mark the two sexual characters that correspond to the male and female roles. A unitary model of sexual character underlies Nancy Chodorow's feminist reworking of the same themes. Here the focus is on how women's sexual character prepares them for mothering and men's does not. Notions of unitary sexual character have also emerged in cultural feminism in the last ten years. The anti-pornography campaigns, for instance, have often presented a lust for domination as the core of male sexuality, and as being more or less undifferentiated among men.

Freud's writings implied rather different conceptions of femininity and masculinity, but most of Freud's followers returned to convention. Prominent in the psychoanalytic shift towards conservatism was the Austrian/American Theodor Reik. His long essay 'The Emotional Differences of the Sexes' is a classic statement of the unitary model. It takes for granted that women and men have sharply different emotional characteristics, and postulates that these are based on their different functions in biological reproduction. Reik draws from this, mainly by speculation, complacent explanations of an extraordinary range of matters, from the double standard to cooking, cattiness, premenstrual tension, and why women are concerned about furniture.

In more recent psychoanalytic literature such conceptions of gender remain active. The American Robert May, for instance, makes the difference between 'the male and the female fantasy patterns' the central theme of his book *Sex and Fantasy*. He pursues a general distinction between 'pride' and 'caring' - compare Parson's 'instrumental' and 'expressive' - through ancient myths and modern personality tests and clinical case histories.

It is clear that unitary conceptions of sexual character have a wide appeal and can give comfort to people of very different political persuasions. This is partly because having a unitary conception of feminine or masculine character does not in itself settle what the content of the two opposed characters might be. Speculation, assertion and inference from biology are the order of the day.

Yet there is a large research literature closely related to this problem: the psychological 'sex difference' research mentioned in chapter 2, which as Viola Klein and Rosalind Rosenberg show has been flowing since the turn of the century.

The facts at issue in this research are what might be called the block differences between women and men - for instance, differences between the average reaction times or tactile sensitivity of women and men; or between average scores on tests of verbal ability, anxiety, or extraversion. There are well-established conventions of method. Comparable samples of women and men are needed, together with a reliable measure of some sort. A test is always made for the statistical significance of whatever difference turns up between average scores, or between the proportions of women and men who meet a given criterion.

'Significance testing' itself presses the research towards a focus

on block differences, since what is tested is not its size or psychological importance, but simply the probability that there exists some difference which is not the result of chance. The kind of conclusion that passes from the journal articles into the textbooks and popular-psychology best sellers is that 'women have higher verbal ability' or 'men are more aggressive'. If a statistically significant block difference does *not* emerge, the researcher is likely to be disappointed and the research may not get published, since it seems to have nothing to say. I have written this kind of dreading paper, about adolescents in Sydney, and, as usual in this genre, paid a lot of attention to items where sex differences did appear and much less attention to the larger number of items where they did not.

When block differences do appear they are conventionally explained by appeal to some underlying traits which distinguish women from men - in other words by a unitary conception of sexual character. Often sex role notions are brought in to provide a common-sense explanation of how sexual character is formed. Thus women are said to be less achievement-oriented than men because they have been socialized to dependency, and so on. Often sex differences are hardly distinguished from sex roles at all; the two blur together in a single concept.

A vast compendium of this kind of research was made in the mid-1970s by Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin. *The Psychology of Sex Differences* reported that block differences between women and men (generally white, affluent, North American college students) did appear fairly consistently in studies of some traits: verbal ability, visual/spatial ability, mathematical ability, aggressiveness. A finding of no block difference fairly consistently appeared in studies of rather more traits: sociability, suggestibility, self-esteem, types of learning, cognitive styles, achievement motivation, sensory modality. The authors entered an 'open finding' - i.e., no consistent pattern - on another range of traits: tactile sensitivity, timidity, activity level, competitiveness, dominance, compliance, nurturance. The research has flowed on since Maccoby and Jacklin wrote. Its results have been mixed, but if it has had any trend it has been to close some of the gaps between women and men that they left open. Robert Plomin and Terry Foch, for instance, find sex differences accounting for only 1 per cent of the variance in a study of children's verbal and quantitative abilities. Olive Johnson and Carolyn Harley report that being right- or left-handed is a

better predictor of cognitive abilities than is sex. Of course these are only two examples from a mass of studies, and there are others which suggest stronger sex differences. Nevertheless one can be very confident of a negative point. Recent research has *not* shown that Maccoby and Jacklin systematically underestimated sex differences.

A striking conclusion emerges. The logic of the genre focuses on 'difference' and its explanation. In fact the main finding, from about eighty years of research, is a massive psychological *similarity* between women and men in the populations studied by psychologists. Clear-cut block differences are few, and confined to restricted topics. Small differences-on-average, in the context of a very large overlapping of the distributions of men and women, are usual even with traits where differences appear fairly consistently. If it were not for the cultural bias of both writers and readers, we might long ago have been talking about this as 'sex similarity' research.

In so far as these scales and measures can be trusted, the notion of distinct unitary sexual characters for women and men has been decisively refuted. With it, much of the common-sense understanding of sex and gender, together with most functionalist sex role theorizing, should collapse.

This has not happened. There is too much invested in the notion of sexual character for a simple factual refutation to destroy it. Yet there has been serious pressure to modify it. The simplest modification is to abandon the idea of categorical differences and interpret the results of data-dredging sex difference research through the formula of variation about a norm.

Overlapping distributions now matter less. Differences between means suffice to establish difference between a male and a female norm. Role theory provides a gloss. Variation about each norm reflects role distance, vagueness or conflict in the expectations, or even deviance. Those studies which fail to find mean differences are interpreted as evidence of overlapping expectations or the convergence of traditional sex roles.

As argued in chapter 3, role theory is infinitely plastic. There is no great interest in its exercises in retrieval. But there is something of more note here: the shift to a focus on variation. Concern with variation in the traits for which feminine and masculine sexual character are explanations is only a step from concern with variation in femininity or masculinity themselves.

This path leads to non-unitary conceptions of sexual character.

The need to take this path is now clear in the research literature; all interesting conceptions of sexual character from here on are non-unitary. Both femininity and masculinity vary, and understanding their variety is central to the psychology of gender. How is that variety to be understood? There are several possible approaches.

### Masculinity/Femininity Scales

The most popular way of grasping diversity in sexual character is to think of people as being arrayed along a dimension that represents differences in some gender-related trait. This is the basis of most paper-and-pencil tests of masculinity/femininity (hereafter M/F). The problem is how to specify where, on the imaginary line representing the dimension, any given person's shadow falls. This is called 'measuring' the trait, and M/F scales differ in the solutions they offer.

Some tests have used projective methods, such as the 'IT' scale which shows children a sexually ambiguous figure and invites them to make up a story about it. But since the 1940s, when the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) came into use, a different form has been usual. This most famous of all psychiatric screening tests contained a masculinity-femininity subscale, and set the pattern of a self-report inventory with many short items. The respondents describe themselves on each item separately, and a count is made of how often a certain kind of response is made. This count, sometimes transformed statistically, becomes the respondent's femininity or masculinity score.

The form of the self-description varies a little. Janet Spence and Robert Helmreich in *Masculinity and Femininity* use a questionnaire which invites people to rate themselves on where they fall between two specified extremes, for example:

*very rough* . . . . . *very gentle*

*goes to pieces under pressure* . . . *stands up well under pressure*

Sandra Bem, author of the famous 'androgyny' scale, dispenses with the polar opposites. Each item simply names a trait and asks respondents to rate how often it is true of them:

*ambitious ...*  
*forceful ...*  
*affectionate ...*  
*child-like ...*

How is it known that these scales measure femininity and masculinity? The usual test has been that each item discriminates statistically between women and men. As Anne Constantino points out in her excellent review of M/F scales, this results in a systematic confusion between 'sex difference' and 'masculinity/femininity'. In principle any item that shows a sex difference can figure in M/F scales. In practice almost anything does. Items range from generalized self-descriptions like those quoted above, to job preferences, word associations, neurotic symptoms, information and aesthetic interests. Constantino remarks that while some items reflect an intuitive notion of what 'masculinity' and 'femininity' mean, in many cases the content seems 'irrelevant to any identifiable definition of the concept'.

Once a point of departure has been established another psychometric criterion takes over, the scale's internal consistency. Candidate items are kept in the scale, or dropped, according to their correlation with other items. Spence and Helmreich's scales illustrate this. The correlation of each item with the total (i.e., the sum of scores on all items) is presented as justification of the coherence of each trait and scale; and those items which have high item-total correlations are chosen for the 'short form' of the scale.

This criterion is likely to whittle down the heterogeneity of content, as it is familiar in-questionnaire research that the highest correlations are between items which ask the same kind of question in slightly different language. More important, it eliminates any possibility of recognizing tension or incoherence within the trait being measured.

The reason for using a scale score is that individual items are not very reliable, and can only be presumed to carry a small drop of the trait being measured, mixed up with various impurities. By combining the answers to a number of questions, the impurities tend to cancel each other out. The way this combining is done is the key to the kind of psychology that quantitative personality research produces. In adding together the item scores, the specific meaning of each question is ignored. In old-fashioned hand-scoring

of questionnaires it was usual to lay a cardboard sheet which masked the questions over the page, with the ticks or crosses of answers appearing through small windows cut in the cardboard. In modern machine-scoring only the number of the question is needed — its wording does not enter the machine or the processing at all. Semantics, in short, is abandoned.

Cutting answers of their particular meaning in order to treat them as partial measures of a dimensional whole is taken for granted in the psychometric literature. What a person thinks she is saying to the researcher is set aside. The tick or cross is treated not as an answer to a question but as a 'response' providing a clue to an underlying entity. The researcher knows about this entity but the 'subject' does not.

Nearly thirty years ago, in *The Person in Psychology*, Paul Lafitte mounted a sustained critique of what he called 'substantive abstraction' in psychological measurement. Other criticisms of the dubious assumptions and attenuation of reality in paper-and-pencil surveys have come from quarters as diverse as psychoanalysis, anthropology and ethnomethodology. The problem is not that the technique was rough in its early days. Recent research commonly takes less account of such problems than the pioneering studies did. The problem is about the bases of the method. Gender scaling, like other forms of personality and attitude scaling, involves a radical desemanticization of human practice. It is a case of what R. D. Lajng in another context called 'transpersonal invalidation'. The chances of a sound understanding of human beings coming out of such research are infinitesimal.

But the approach does have important ideological effects. Desemanticization allows research to recognize variation without having to deal with contradiction. If a person's answers to related items conflict, this does not register as a problem, for instance a question of ambivalence. It simply lowers the total score. If some items do not fit with the others, there is no requirement to investigate why. They are simply dropped from the item pool as a normal step in producing the final instrument.

Femininity and masculinity are thus implicitly theorized as homogeneous dimensions of temperament, which can be measured in all people. In a roundabout way this allows scalar research to recognize a point that unitary conceptions of sexual character could not, the coexistence of masculinity and femininity in the same person. Not in the way Freud saw them, as desires and

identifications in conflict with each other, but through the notion of multiple dimensions of variation. Femininity and masculinity need not be treated as polar opposites, i.e., as ends of the same dimension. Each might be treated as a separate scale, and the same person might get high scores on both. This idea occurred to a number of American psychologists in the early 1970s, with Bem's version, 'androgyny', gaining most attention. Spence and Helmreich performed a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* by constructing a femininity scale, a masculinity scale and a M/F scale and showing they were all statistically unconnected when administered to the same people.

The muddle in interpretation that follows from the desemanticization of human communications is obvious enough. Constantinople's summing-up on masculinity and femininity scales a decade ago is still sound: 'both theoretically and empirically they seem to be among the muddiest concepts in the psychologist's vocabulary.' The scalar approach has produced very little new understanding of the psychosocial processes involved.

The reasons for its popularity perhaps have more to do with the politics of academic psychology. Scalar M/F research offers a way of treating an important social question in terms acceptable to a psychological establishment very much concerned with scientificity, formal measurement and statistical proof. It is quick and straightforward, since the conventions of scaling are well established; the professional journals like it, and no one is threatened by it. At this level scalar research is part of the domestication of sexual politics in the name of science. It is an important political fact that a great deal of it has been done by women.

At a deeper level this kind of psychology participates in the process of reification. Turning a process, an action, or a relationship into an object, or treating it as if it were an object, is one of the fundamental dynamics of modern culture. Gender scaling involves a drastic reification of the process of self-expression or accounting for oneself. Even the stylized self-description called for by the scale items is converted, by the operations that produce 'scores' and then statistically manipulate them, into location in the abstract space of a personality dimension.

If this research has been popular, and people feel they recognize themselves in dimensional accounts (or in the unitary accounts of sexual character discussed previously), it is not because people are

dots on a computer-generated graph in  $N$  dimensions. It is, perhaps, because the process of reification is so far advanced as to make recognition of qualitative diversity threatening. Fear, not of 'otherness' so much as of the riotous exuberance of motive and imagination that is a possibility in sexual life, can be a powerful motive in a world partly reified already.

### Multiple Models: From Typology to Relationship

Scalar models of personality have often stemmed from theories of personality 'types'. Extraversion-introversion scales and the famous 'F scale' of authoritarianism both derive from such typologies, devised by Jung and the Frankfurt school respectively. M/F scales similarly derive from unitary models of sexual character, in effect 'dimensionalizing' them by adding a range of possibilities in between. But this is not the only way diversity can be recognized in a theory of types. One may hold to the conception of a whole personality rather than a dimension, and subdivide or multiply the types.

In the case of sexual character the classic of this approach is Simone de Beauvoir's account of femininity in Book Two of *The Second Sex*. Starting with a general difference in the social situation and ontological status of women and men, she goes on to develop a subtle account of half-a-dozen types of femininity in literature and French social life: the lesbian, the married woman, the prostitute, the independent woman, etc. Her types are partly based on social circumstances, partly on the patterns of inner dynamics that will be discussed in the following chapter.

In principle the same kind of thing can be done for types of masculinity, though no Simon de Beauvoir has appeared to do it. Andrew Tolson's *The Limits of Masculinity* makes a beginning. Going through the (mostly British) research in community studies and industrial sociology, Tolson draws out connections between economic circumstance, life cycle and sexual identity in a broad distinction between a working-class type and a middle-class type of masculinity.

Both de Beauvoir and Tolson assume a one-to-one correspondence between character type and milieu. This is a step forward from unitary models of sexual character, but not a long one. Character is still treated as unitary within a given setting. The

logic is the same as in 'national character' or culture-and-personality research that described the 'modal personalities' supposed to characterize Germany, Japan, Samoa. The same treatment of sexual character is found in the cross-cultural contrasts made by Margaret Mead in *Male and Female*.

The next step is to recognize that qualitatively different types are produced within the same social setting. Evidence for this is not difficult to find. Here is an example taken from the collection of working-class autobiographies already quoted. The author, Bim Andrews, is talking about growing up and going to work at Cambridge in the 1920s:

In the mid-twenties, I learned how to become a clerk at the Co-op, and after evening classes in shorthand and typing, a higher grade office worker. A dutiful, heads-down-all-day, worker, with no ideas at all about my rights. Not even my basic rights as a human being, never mind my rights as part of a deal involving my work and their money. True, there was some talk of a Trades Union, but no girl or woman ever thought it applied to her. Some of my work kept me standing up all day, and when I had bad menstrual cramps, as I often did, I would slink off to the lavatory to sit down for as long as I dared. No rest room, not even a chair in our crowded cloakroom.

Some new ideas did take root – the Co-op was quite an evangelical movement then, and it was their evening classes which I joined. But my emotions and understanding were still at sixes and sevens. Which was the right way to live? Like Nellie, with her placid face and her engagement ring, and her pieces of linen and underclothes in tissue paper, brought for display to the girls before settling in her bottom drawer? Or like Jessie, coy and nudging – what we would now call sexy – surrounded by men, single and married? Or like Miss Marshall, the General Manager's secretary and our immediate boss. Composed, and sharp with us, the owner of a little car, involved in a sly relationship with the Manager of the Grocery Dept?

Nellie, Jessie, Miss Marshall and indeed the earnest Bim herself, are present in her mind as types – real types, not ideal or abstracted types – standing for different 'ways to live'. Yet they do not float free from each other. Bim experiences a relationship confronting them. It is a kind of rivalry between alternatives, confronting her with an existential and to some extent moral choice. She can become a certain kind of woman, enter a certain

kind of femininity, by throwing herself forward along one path in life.

I will return to the idea of a life path in chapters 9 and 10; here the important point is that the types exist in a relationship with each other. In the research which first raised this question for me, in an Australian ruling-class boys' school, the connections take the definite form of a hierarchy. A teacher whom we call Angus Barr described to us an episode, some details of which we could confirm from other sources, of what he thought of as 'bullying' between two groups of boys:

There are a group ['the Bloods'] which I suppose you can say is a traditional one, the sporting group, they are more active physically ... And sometimes they ride a bit rough over another group who have been called, and now call themselves, 'the Cyrils', the conshies. [From 'conscientious'.] Who are the ones who don't play any games. Who have this year [had] a particularly bad time from the Blood group ... And about the middle of the year I had to – it hasn't arisen in past years, I've taken the form for a number of years so I think I know – had to intervene. And say, Well now, what is being done by some of you to some others has reached limits where it has got to stop, it is going too far ... [The Cyrils] were these quite clever little boys who are socially totally inadequate, and yet who have got very good brains. They've all got glasses, short, very fat and that sort of thing ... I think I was reasonably successful in stopping it. I tried to ask discreetly some of the Cyrils how things had been getting on, and they said, Well it had been better. And I spoke to one or two of the Bloods, said that it's got to stop.

In contrast to Bim Andrews's perceptions, the difference between these masculinities is not a matter of free choice by the boys: an unathletic way of life may for instance be imposed by a boy's understanding of his physique. Larger cultural dynamics can be detected here. But the crucial point is that entering one group does not make the other irrelevant. Far from it: an active relationship is constructed. The Bloods persecute the Cyrils, because being a Blood *involves* an active rejection of what they see as effeminacy.

This particular pattern of conflict does not arise by chance. The school in question is noted for its attachment to a fiercely competitive body-contact sport, football. Both official school policy, and the ethos among staff, parents and Old Boys, encourage



activities in which the kind of aggressive, physically dominant masculinity represented by the Bloods is at a premium. The boys are obliged to define their attitude to this demand, either for or against. Hence they polarize along the axis described by Mr Barr. Yet those boys who react against the model embraced by the Bloods are not simply pushed into limbo. For the school not only wants football glory, it also must have academic success. A high rate of performance in matriculation examinations is necessary if the school is to hold its position in the now strongly competitive secondary-education market. In short, the school needs the Cyrils too. Within their own sphere it gives them honour: acknowledging examination success by means of prizes, giving awards to the chess club as well as the football team. And it protects their interests, as Mr Barr's intervention to stop the 'bullying' neatly shows.

The production of multiple masculinities and femininities can be seen in studies of other schools. In one of the earlier school ethnographies, *Social Relations in a Secondary School*, David Hargreaves portrayed the production of a semi-delinquent 'subculture' in the lower streams of a British secondary modern school. One of its components was a rough, aggressive masculinity, strongly and no doubt deliberately contrasted with the more compliant behaviour of boys in the upper streams. A similar pattern in a similar school a decade later is traced by Paul Willis in *Learning to Labour*, a contrast between 'the lads' and 'the ear'oles'. Willis is more explicit about the construction of masculinity and its connection with class fate, as the two groups of boys head for factory jobs on the one hand and white-collar jobs on the other.

In the Australian girls' private school we call Auburn College, there is not only a differentiation between several kinds of femininity, but also a recent change in the pattern of hegemony among them. An academic renovation of the school, undertaken by a new headmistress and new staff, has altered the context of the girls' peer-group life. The prestige formerly enjoyed by a 'social' set of girls has been broken and their place in the sun taken by academically successful girls headed for university and professional careers.

The pattern of differentiation and relation appears in other institutions besides schools. The fashion industry is an important case, given the significance of clothes and cosmetics as markers of gender. Here there is a constant interplay between the economic need for a turnover of styles – the basis of 'fashion' itself – and

the need to sustain the structures of motive that constitute their markets.

In the aftermath of the new feminism, the promotion of a 'liberated' femininity became the basis of many marketing strategies. 'Charlie' perfumes and cosmetics (introduced by Revlon in 1973) and 'Virginia Slims' cigarettes were among the most heavily promoted examples. Yet a femininity that gets 'liberated' too completely loses the need to present itself through cosmetics and fashionable clothes. Thus an oscillation: on one poster 'Charlie' strides out boldly in trousers; on another, 'Pretty Polly' advertises its fragile pantihose with the caption, 'For girls who don't want to wear the trousers'. Some marketers take the contradiction inside the one promotion: thus 'natural look' cosmetics; or a magazine that uses a feminist name, *Ms London*, as a vehicle for wholly stereotyped advertising.

The fashion industry works through competition of images, but also on the assumption that the competition is always being resolved. A leading designer emerges; a 'look' is settled on; a particular presentation of femininity made normative. In cases such as Dior and the 'New Look' of 1947, a trend lasting over a number of seasons may be set. Moreover, the brilliantly lit centre stage of high fashion is only a small part of the clothing industry's sales. The bulk of the business concerns cheap, drab, and poorly made clothing for the mass market in styles that change slowly. Two centuries ago this was called bluntly 'slop cloathing'; it is now called in the rag trade 'dumb fashion'. So the currently exalted style does not eliminate all other styles. Rather it subordinates them.

There need not be any psychological traits which all femininities have in common and which distinguish them from all masculinities, or vice versa. The character structure of the academic high-flyers at Auburn College is probably closer to that of Milton's 'Cyrils' than to socialite femininities. What unites the femininities of a given social milieu is the double *context* in which they are formed: on the one hand in relation to the image and experience of a female body, on the other to the social definitions of a woman's place and the cultural oppositions of masculinity and femininity. Femininity and masculinity are not essences: they are ways of living certain relationships. It follows that static typologies of sexual character have to be replaced by histories, analyses of the joint production of sets of psychological forms.

To this point I have discussed the production of sexual character as if each milieu were independent of all others. It is time to bring into the analysis the structures that interrelate milieux (chapter 6) and their historical composition into a gender order for the society as a whole (chapter 7).

To start with the structure of power, workplace studies like those discussed in chapter 5 show that face-to-face relations are strongly conditioned by the general power situation between employers and employees and its materialization in particular labour processes. A notable case is the job of personal 'secretary' in business. An apparently very individualized relationship of mutual dependence and trust between the executive (generally a man) and the personal secretary (almost always a woman) in fact rests on sharp differences of income, the industrial vulnerability of the employee, and the overall social power and authority of men. A specific version of femininity is called for, in which technical competence and the social presentation of attractiveness, social skill and interpersonal compliance are fused. This kind of femininity has to be produced, and is by the informal training documented in Chris Griffin's study of British girls moving from school into office work.

The power hierarchy among men in the industrial enterprise is clear enough, from managers and professionals at the top to unqualified manual workers at the bottom. In sharp contrast to the situation of personal secretaries, the men in manual industrial work are often in situations that allow a countervailing solidarity (one of the bases of unionism) and with it a rejection of the masculinity of the dominant group. John Lippert provides a striking description of the aggressive, sometimes violent, heterosexual masculinity produced among motor manufacturing workers in Detroit. The description can be matched in other countries: Meredith Burgmann's account of 'machismo' among radical builders' labourers in Sydney and Paul Willis's account of masculine 'shop-floor culture' among metal workers in Birmingham. The common elements are a cult of masculinity centring on physical prowess, and sexual contempt directed at managers, and men in office work generally, as being effete.

These examples also point to the gender structuring of pro-

duction. Elements of sexual character are embedded in the distinctive sets of practices sometimes called 'occupational cultures'. Professionalism is a case in point. The combination of theoretical knowledge with technical expertise is central to a profession's claim to competence and to a monopoly of practice. This has been constructed historically as a form of masculinity: emotionally flat, centred on a specialized skill, insistent on professional esteem and technically based dominance over other workers, and requiring for its highest (specialist) development the complete freedom from childcare and domestic work provided by having wives and maids to do it. The masculine character of professionalism has been supported by the simplest possible mechanism, the exclusion of women. Women have had a long struggle even to get the basic training, and are still effectively excluded from professions like accountancy and engineering.

In manual trades, and manual work more broadly, the claim to competence is rather different. Here the most competent are not the most specialized but the most versatile — those with a range of skills, able to tackle any job that offers. This too is often constructed as a form of masculinity dependent on a domestic division of labour. Tradesmen have often been prepared to move around from place to place, even from country to country, to increase their range of experience, the wife's willingness to stay or go being assumed. Fathers have taken care to provide their sons with a range of skills as insurance against economic fluctuations. To quote another British working-class autobiography, from a miner's son called Fred Broughton who grew up in the years before World War I, 'Father used to say, "I shall not leave you much money, but I will teach you every job, then you can always get work". He showed us every job in the garden and on the farm, including how to get stone in the quarry and trim it and build stone walls.'

The construction of nursing as an element of the sexual division of labour, an occupation blending a particular version of femininity with the technical requirements of the job, has already been discussed.

Finally the structure of cathexis is involved. This is the most obvious of structural determinations of sexual character because of the prominence of heterosexual couple relationships in everyday life. It is folklore that 'opposites attract'. One of the most familiar features of sexual display is behaviour and clothing that emphasizes



stereotyped sex differences. Stud's display their biceps and pectorals, suave charmers grow their pencil moustaches; 'girls' emphasize their vulnerability in tight skirts and high-heeled shoes, sheer stockings and make-up that is constantly in need of repair. So much emotion is adrift around these marks of difference that they can get catheted in their own right, as argued in chapter 5. These stereotypes are so familiar that it is necessary to stress that they are not the whole story. Alongside the Errol Flynn's and John Wayne's are figures like Cary Grant, whose appeal is specially as a model of sympathetic (though not effeminate) masculinity. In a study of images of masculinity in Australian television, Glen Lewis has pointed to the prominence of 'soft' men as presenters, especially in daytime programs directed at women.

Desire may be organized around identification and similarity rather than around difference. Homosexual love is the obvious case. The attempt to reduce this to attraction-of-opposites by assuming it is based on a butch/femme pattern is now generally discredited. Gay liberation theory lays emphasis instead on the *solidarity* created by love between women or between men. The point is that there are many more possibilities than the standard dichotomy or complete structurelessness. Works like Pat Califia's *Sapphicstry* explore a variety of erotic constructions of femininity (homosexuality still presupposes gender division) based on identification and shared experience; the same can be done for masculinity.

There is a related possibility among heterosexual people, for powerful desire can exist between those whose character structure is similar. An *interplay* between identification and reciprocity, and a literal playing with similarity and difference, becomes possible as a basis of eroticism. On such a basis heterosexual masculinity and femininity might be recomposed as various kinds of psychological hermaphroditism, a possibility I will return to in chapter 13.

To sum up: it is possible to see how each of the major structures impinges on the way femininity and masculinity are formed in particular milieux. Conversely, these structures must be seen as the vehicles for the constitution of femininity and masculinity as collective patterns on a scale far beyond that of an individual setting. In the terms proposed in Part II, we have moved from particular gender regimes to the society-wide gender order. The question now to be faced is how, at the level of a whole society, the elements are composed, interrelated and ordered.

### Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity

The central argument can be put in a few paragraphs. There is an ordering of versions of femininity and masculinity at the level of the whole society, in some ways analogous to the patterns of face-to-face relationship within institutions. The possibilities of variation, of course, are vastly greater. The sheer complexity of relationships involving millions of people guarantees that ethnic differences and generational differences as well as class patterns come into play. But in key respects the organization of gender on the very large scale must be more skeletal and simplified than the human relationships in face-to-face milieux. The forms of femininity and masculinity constituted at this level are stylized and impoverished. Their interrelation is centred on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women.

This structural fact provides the main basis for relationships among men that define a hegemonic form of masculinity in the society as a whole. 'Hegemonic masculinity' is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works.

There is no femininity that is hegemonic in the sense that the dominant form of masculinity is hegemonic among men. This is not a new observation. Viola Klein's historical study of conceptions of 'the feminine character' noted wryly how little the leading theorists could agree on what it was: 'we find not only contradiction on particular points but a bewildering variety of traits considered characteristic of women by the various authorities'. More recently the French analyst Luce Irigaray, in a celebrated essay 'This Sex Which Is Not One', has emphasized the absence of any clear-cut definition for women's eroticism and imagination in a patriarchal society.

At the level of mass social relations, however, forms of femininity are defined clearly enough. It is the global subordination of women to men that provides an essential basis for differentiation. One form is defined around compliance with this subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men. I will call this 'emphasized femininity'. Others are defined centrally by strategies of resistance or forms of non-compliance. Others again

are defined by complex strategic combinations of compliance, resistance and co-operation. The interplay among them is a major part of the dynamics of change in the gender order as a whole.

The rest of this section will examine more closely the cases of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, making brief comments on subordinated and marginalized forms. The latter will come back into focus in chapters 10 and 12.

In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, 'hegemony' means (as Gramsci's analyses of class relations in Italy from which the term is borrowed) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is.

Two common misunderstandings of the concept should be cleared up immediately. First, though 'hegemony' does not refer to ascendancy based on force, it is not incompatible with ascendancy based on force. Indeed it is common for the two to go together. Physical or economic violence backs up a dominant cultural pattern (for example beating up 'perverts'), or ideologies justify the holders of physical power ('law and order'). The connection between hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal violence is close, though not simple.

Second, 'hegemony' does not mean total cultural dominance, the obliteration of alternatives. It means ascendancy achieved within a balance of forces, that is, a state of play. Other patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated. If we do not recognize this it would be impossible to account for the everyday contestation that actually occurs in social life, let alone for historical changes in definitions of gender patterns on the grand scale.

Hegemonic masculinity, then, is very different from the notion of a general 'male sex role'; though the concept allows us to formulate more precisely some of the sound points made in the sex-role literature. First, the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men. Indeed the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures, such as the film characters played by Humphrey

Bogart, John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone. Or real models may be publicized who are so remote from everyday achievement that they have the effect of an unattainable ideal, like the Australian Rules footballer Ron Barassi or the boxer Muhammed Ali.

As we move from face-to-face settings to structures involving millions of people, the easily symbolized aspects of interaction become more prominent. Hegemonic masculinity is very public. In a society of mass communications it is tempting to think that it exists only as publicity. Hence the focus on media images and media discussions of masculinity in the 'Books About Men' of the 1970s and 1980s, from Warren Farrell's *The Liberated Man* to Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men*.

To focus on the media images alone would be a mistake. They most not correspond to the actual characters of the men who hold most social power – in contemporary societies the corporate and state elites. Indeed a ruling class may allow a good deal of sexual dissent. A minor but dramatic instance is the tolerance for homosexuality that the British diplomat Guy Burgess could assume from other men of his class during his career as a Soviet spy. The public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support. The notion of 'hegemony' generally implies a large measure of consent. Few men are Bogarts or Stallones, many collaborate in sustaining those images.

There are various reasons for complicity, and a thorough study of them would go far to illuminate the whole system of sexual politics. Fantasy gratification is one – nicely satirized in Woody Allen's Bogart take-off, *Play it Again, Sam*. Displaced aggression might be another – and the popularity of very violent movies from *Dirty Harry* to *Rambo* suggest that a great deal of this is floating around. But it seems likely that the major reason is that most men benefit from the subordination of women, and hegemonic masculinity is the cultural expression of this ascendancy.

This needs careful formulation. It does not imply that hegemonic masculinity means being particularly nasty to women. Women may feel as oppressed by non-hegemonic masculinities, may even find the hegemonic pattern more familiar and manageable. There is likely to be a kind of 'fit' between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. What it does imply is the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women. In this sense hegemonic masculinity must embody a successful

collective strategy in relation to women. Given the complexity of gender relations no simple or uniform strategy is possible: a 'mix' is necessary. So hegemonic masculinity can contain at the same time, quite consistently, openings towards domesticity and openings towards violence, towards misogyny and towards heterosexual attraction.

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities. These other masculinities need not be as clearly defined – indeed, achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness.

The most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual, being closely connected to the institution of marriage; and a key form of subordinated masculinity is homosexual. This subordination involves both direct interactions and a kind of ideological warfare. Some of the interactions were described in chapter 1: police and legal harassment, street violence, economic discrimination. These transactions are tied together by the contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men that is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity. The AIDS scare has been marked less by sympathy for gays as its main victims than by hostility to them as the bearers of a new threat. The key point of media concern is whether the 'gay plague' will spread to 'innocent', i.e., straight, victims.

In other cases of subordinated masculinity the condition is temporary. Cynthia Cockburn's splendid study of printing workers in London portrays a version of hegemonic masculinity that involved ascendancy over young men as well as over women. The workers recalled their apprenticeships in terms of drudgery and humiliation, a ritual of induction into trade and masculinity at the same time. But once they were in, they were 'brothers'.

Several general points about masculinity also apply to the analysis of femininity at the mass level. These patterns too are historical: relationships change, new forms of femininity emerge and others disappear. The ideological representations of femininity draw on, but do not necessarily correspond to, actual femininities as they are lived. What most women support is not necessarily what they are.

There is however a fundamental difference. All forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the

overall subordination of women to men. For this reason there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men.

This fundamental asymmetry has two main aspects. First, the concentration of social power in the hands of men leaves limited scope for women to construct institutionalized power relationships over other women. It does happen on a face-to-face basis, notably in mother-daughter relationships. Institutionalized power hierarchies have also existed in contexts like the girls' schools pictured in *Mädchen in Uniform* and *Frost in May*. But the note of domination that is so important in relations between kinds of masculinity is muted. The much lower level of violence between women than violence between men is a fair indication of this. Second, the organization of a hegemonic form around dominance over the other sex is absent from the social construction of femininity. Power, authority, aggression, technology are not thematized in femininity at large as they are in masculinity. Equally important, no pressure is set up to negate or subordinate other forms of femininity in the way hegemonic masculinity must negate other masculinities. It is likely therefore that actual femininities in our society are more diverse than actual masculinities.

The dominance structure which the construction of femininity cannot avoid is the global dominance of heterosexual men. The process is likely to polarize around compliance or resistance to this dominance.

The option of compliance is central to the pattern of femininity which is given most cultural and ideological support at present, called here 'emphasized femininity'. This is the translation to the large scale of patterns already discussed in particular institutions and milieux, such as the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men's desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labour-market discrimination against women. At the mass level these are organized around themes of sexual receptivity in relation to younger women and motherhood in relation to older women.

Like hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity as a cultural construction is very public, though its content is specifically linked with the private realm of the home and the bedroom. Indeed it is promoted in mass media and marketing with an insistence and on a scale far beyond that found for any form of masculinity.

The articles and advertisements in mass-circulation women's magazines, the 'women's pages' of mass-circulation newspapers and the soap operas and 'games' of daytime television, are familiar cases. Most of this promotion, it might be noted, is organized, financed and supervised by men.

To call this pattern 'emphasized femininity' is also to make a point about how the cultural package is used in interpersonal relationships. This kind of femininity is performed, and performed especially to men. There is a great deal of folklore about how to sustain the performance. It is a major concern of women's magazines from *Women's Weekly* to *Vogue*. It is even taken up and turned into highly ambivalent comedy by Hollywood (*How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *Mary a Millionaire*; *Toolsie*). Marilyn Monroe was both archetype and satirist of emphasized femininity. Marabel Morgan's 'total woman', an image that somehow mixes sexpot and Jesus Christ, uses the same tactics and has the same ambivalences.

Femininity organized as an adaptation to men's power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance and empathy as womanly virtues, is not in much of a state to establish hegemony over other kinds of femininity. There is a familiar paradox about antifeminist women's groups like 'Women Who Want to be Women' who exalt the *Kinder, Kirche und Küche* version of femininity: they can only become politically active by subverting their own prescriptions. They must rely heavily on religious ideology and on political backing from conservative men. The relations they establish with other kinds of femininity are not so much domination as attempted marginalization.

Central to the maintenance of emphasized femininity is practice that prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation. When feminist historiography describes women's experience as 'hidden from history', in Sheila Rowbotham's phrase, it is responding partly to this fact. Conventional historiography recognizes, indeed presupposes, conventional femininity. What is hidden from it is the experience of spinsters, lesbians, unionists, prostitutes, madwomen, rebels and maiden aunts, manual workers, midwives and witches. And what is involved in radical sexual politics, in one of its dimensions, is precisely a reassertion and recovery of marginalized forms of femininity in the experience of groups like these.

## NOTES

**Unitary Models and Sex-difference Research**

(pp. 167-71). Research since Maccoby and Jacklin is large and life is short; one example must do. The text cited two studies of cognition, an area where Maccoby and Jacklin thought sex differences were well established. Fairweather (1976) argued that these differences were trivial. Hyde (1981) concluded they were consistent but small. Rosenthal and Rubin (1982) concluded they were not so small, but probably declining. Lest this seem like a trend, Fendrich-Salowe et al. (1982) and Denno (1982) agree with Fairweather. An outside observer may reasonably suspend judgement between these views, but all must agree that if there are systematic sex differences here, they are not very large in terms of overall variance on the measures.

**Masculinity/Femininity Scales**

(pp. 171-5). For classic critiques of reified measurement in attitude and personality research see Goldhamer (1949), Williams (1959) and Cicourel (1964). Lafitte's critique (1957) remains the most penetrating on technical grounds.

**Multiple Models**

(pp. 175-9). Bim Andrews' quotation from Burnett (1982), pp. 130-1. Angus Barr quoted from original interview transcript. For the story of 'Auburn College' see Connell et al. (1981). The argument at the end of this section leaves open the sense in which we can speak of 'femininity' in a man and 'masculinity' in a woman. The psychoanalytic evidence to come in chapter 9 implies that these are meaningful expressions, but since they involve a psychological structure that works *against* bodily experience it can hardly be the same kind of structure as women's femininity or men's masculinity. The pressures set up can be ferocious enough to change the body-image itself, as with those transsexuals who experience their penises or their breasts as not being part of their bodies.

**The Effect of Structures**

(pp. 180-2). Fred Broughton quotation from Burnett (1982), p. 299.

**Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity**

(p. 183-8). Quotation from Klein (1946) p. 164. On Burgess's remarkable immunity see Seale and McConville (1978). The concepts discussed in this section are both important and underdeveloped; my argument is more tentative than usual here. The mother-daughter relationship might modify the argument about femininity significantly.

## 9

# The Mystery in Broad Daylight

## Gender Formation and Psychoanalysis

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How are the structures of personal life discussed in the last chapter formed? There are two main approaches to this question that are compatible with a social analysis of gender. Socialization theory treats gender formation as the acquisition and internalization of social norms. It stresses continuity between social context and personality, and the homogeneity of personality itself. Psychoanalysis treats gender formation as the effect of an encounter with power and necessity rather than normative prescriptions. It emphasizes discontinuity between social context and personality, and points to radical division within personality. I will make only a brief examination of socialization theory as it quickly appears inadequate to the problem; then turn to the two main branches of psychoanalysis that offer some grip on the question.

### Socialization

In both academic social science and the popular literature on gender in the last two decades the commonest approach has been through concepts of social moulding or 'socialization'.

Schematically, the main argument runs like this. The new-born child has a biological sex but no social gender. As it grows older society provides a string of prescriptions, templates, or models of behaviour appropriate to the one sex or the other. Certain agencies of socialization – notably the family, the media, the peer group and the school – make these expectations and models concrete and provide the settings in which they are appropriated by the