Part one *Theorizing Masculinities*

CHAPTER ONE

The Construction of Gender Identity

Recent debates about identity in political philosophy have centered around the adequacy of the Enlightenment concept of the autonomous rational individual as a universal model of selfhood and starting point for political action, a concept that has long been central in Western thinking.[1] In the analytical philosophical tradition, mind and body have often been treated separately, and abstract narratives of the mind dominate discussions of the human subject—at least in the case of the male subject, who stands in for the universal. The female subject, "woman," where mentioned in modern political philosophy, has usually been constructed in rather a different way, as an opposite pole to "man." If man is all mind, then woman is all body. For example, whereas men were seen by Hegel as pushing forward the dialectic of history, women were seen as incapable of the required self-consciousness of conceptual thought. Mired as they were in the concrete world, they would be condemned merely to repeat the cycles of life.[2]

Critics of this concept have drawn on feminist, communitarian, and postmodern thinking to argue that a redrafting of our philosophical understanding of the political agent would require more adequate recognition of

the consequences of our physical embodiment, regardless of sex; of the way in which we are also embedded in social processes; and of the degree of indeterminacy and multiplicity in life situations. The concept of the embedded self would recognize that apparently strongly autonomous selves are themselves social products—products that emerge through interactive dialogue with others within a political and cultural framework that provides for their development—rather than individual starting points.[3]

Unlike the approaches to political identity taken by analytical philosophy, which focus on the rational mind, theoretical approaches to gender identity have, since their inception, grappled with both physical embodiment and social and institutional processes as important elements. The belated recognition by some political philosophers that men, too, are socially embedded and physically embodied, and that this could be of philosophical and political importance, shows a partial convergence of interest between what were two very different fields. This convergence might perhaps lead to a wider recognition of some of the more generally relevant insights that sophisticated and imaginative feminist approaches to gender identity have provided.

This chapter draws on feminist thinking about sex, gender, and identities to examine some theoretical accounts of the process of gender-identity formation. The literature on gender covers a wide field, with contributions from a number of disparate disciplines, representing a variety of interests and methodologies. There is no consensus on either the nature or significance of gender identities, how they are produced, or whether they should be reinforced, modified, or abolished, even among feminists, who by no means have a monopoly on gender theory. Nevertheless, in spite of their considerable differences and the complexity of the debate between them, this chapter will argue that the theories all tend to revolve around three dimensions of analysis; namely, (1) physical embodiment, including the body and the role of reproductive biology; (2) institutions and the gendered social processes that they encompass, including the family, the economy, the state; and (3) the discursive dimension of the gendered construction of language and its constitutive role in the gender order.

Some approaches have tended to emphasize the primary importance of one dimension, ignoring the others or demoting them to the status of effects. Others have discussed the relationship between two of the dimensions to the virtual exclusion of the third. During the 1990s, the center of the de-

bate moved away from disputes both among feminists and between feminists and their critics over the relative contributions to gender identity of nature (listed above as 1) and nurture (2) toward a cleavage between both these groups and those who argue that the key to gender identity lies with discourse (3). Any adequate account of the construction of gender identity, however, needs to pay attention to all three dimensions simultaneously. It is important to trace out more of the complex interactions between these multiple factors, rather than trying to locate gender identity as being founded in any one of them.

The recognition of this need to take a more complex view of gender identity has been gaining ground among feminist academics. For example, Ramazanoglu and Holland (1993) discuss the development of feminist theorizing with reference to questions thrown up by their own research on teenage sexuality. During the discussion, they move from a position of identifying two poles of power that need to be reconciled—namely, the material and the discursive—to a final position where they argue that "there is a complex interaction between grounded embodiment, the discourses of sexuality and institutionalized power. Understanding this interaction is critical for targeting political struggles, but it remains an elusive area" (Ramazanoglu and Holland 1993, 260).

It is this move toward embracing all three dimensions of analysis as significant, while recognizing that none is entirely autonomous, that allows for the complexity of gender identifications to be analytically unraveled. Gender identity is not the product of a single cause or factor that then becomes fixed, but rather is negotiated in a lifelong process. The three dimensions and their interactions constitute a constraining or limiting field within which, or against which, such negotiations take place, whether at the individual or group level. Each dimension in turn is influenced by the power of the others, so there is a degree of indeterminacy in their relations. In particular historical periods, in different cultures or under varying circumstances, the configuration of power relations between bodies, institutions, and discourses will vary, such that the influence of each may construed as greater or lesser, and thus both the content and significance of gendered identities will also vary.

What follows is a personal and, of necessity, partial reconstruction of a more or less chronological development of feminist theorizing on the construction of gender identity, highlighting the way that the focus of theory

has moved from the body, through the social, to the discursive, and back to the body again.[4] Much of the discussion is conducted in terms of women and femininity. This reflects both the concerns of feminists and the fact that the female sex has been problematized as different from the male norm in Western thinking and practice. Nevertheless, the theories considered would apply equally to men, in structure if not in content, and are therefore potentially useful for understanding the relationship between men and masculinity.

"The Problem of Biology"

Given the importance that Western discourse has given to women's biology as a basis for their identity as women, it is hardly surprising that the role of biology has loomed large in many accounts of gender identity, and to this day remains a contested area within feminism.

The second wave of feminism, at the beginning of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, was launched against the background of a fierce nature/nurture debate between psychologists, sociologists, and sociobiologists over the relative contributions of biology and social factors to "sex roles" and gender identities. From the newly popularized postwar discipline of primatology came various biological explanations for the existence of widespread disparities between the roles and publicly recorded achievements of men and women in modern societies. Psychobiologists sought to explain the contemporary sexual division of labor and male dominance in terms of aggression, submission, and dominance hierarchies among males and their supposed significance in the development of social behavior in prehistoric times.[5] Sociobiologists, on the other hand, concentrated on genetic differences between the sexes and on genetic investment strategies. Both groups used animal behavior, especially primate behavior, as evidence of human developmental history or genetic heritage.

Many feminists regarded these theories as reductionist and conservative justifications of the status quo. They pointed out that biologically reductionist arguments have a pedigree that can be traced back for centuries in Western culture, culminating in the now discredited social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century. Psycho- and sociobiological arguments were seen as part of this tradition of "bad science" (Haraway 1991, 134) in which leaps from one period of history or level of analysis to another were made

without explanation; in which human social categories were projected onto other animals and then used as a basis for explaining human behavior in the most crudely anthropomorphic fashion; and in which objectivity was never achieved due to the unacknowledged cultural biases of the researchers themselves (Sahlins 1977; Sayers 1982).

Meanwhile, a parallel line of inquiry, sex-difference research, sought to measure inherent differences between the sexes in the laboratory. In this kind of analysis, sexual character was also seen as unitary: "men" and "women" were assumed to be distinct personality types embodying stereotypically "masculine" and "feminine" traits and characteristics en mass. The research looked at "block" sex differences in such characteristics as aggression levels, tactile sensitivity, and spatial and linguistic skills. Such research has been beset by the methodological problems that all positivistic science encounters when trying to measure socially meaningful behavior. For example, how does one measure aggression? By personality testing? By hormone levels? What exactly is being measured when one measures aggression? Which behaviors count as aggressive varies according to social and cultural context; hence, it is impossible to measure objectively.[6] Even when sex-difference research has confined itself to testing things that can be measured, the results have not shown many significant differences, but rather a huge overlap in traits and abilities between the sexes (Maccoby and Jacklin 1975). Eighty years of research focused on sex differences have revealed "a massive psychological *similarity* between women and men in the populations studied" (Connell 1987, 170). Meanwhile, cross-cultural studies suggested that few sex differences in social behavior seemed inevitable, and that "the plasticity of the sexes seems quite enough to allow for a gender revolution of any sort" (Rosenblatt and Cunningham 1976, 89).

Although the feminist critique of sex-difference research and some of the cruder reductionisms in sociobiology were undoubtedly justified, it was nonetheless true that socialist-feminist hostility to biological explanations was partly motivated by a conviction that biological explanations were either conservative or fascistic. If widespread gender differences were to have a biological rather than social foundation, then women were oppressed either by their own biology or by the biology of men. The only hope of emancipation would be through the technology of artificial reproduction, a conclusion reached by the early second-wave feminist Shulamith Firestone (1971). Indeed, some feminist "maternalists" have since gone down this

road, pursuing separatism, artificial insemination, and asserting women's "natural" superiority over men, but the rest preferred to look for social explanations of gender that might provide a better basis for social and political change.

Sex and Gender

While the debate over sex differences and sex roles rumbled on, one way around "the problem of biology" was to separate it from the social by making an analytical distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender. Popularized by Ann Oakley (1972) in the early 1970s and rapidly becoming an accepted norm in much feminist theory and gender studies literature, this distinction allowed gender differences encompassing the formation of gender identities and the qualities of masculinity and femininity to be treated as aspects of social and psychological development, separate from questions about biological sex differences (Bailey 1993, 100).[7] This sociosexual division then enabled the analysis of gender identity to move squarely into the realm of social and institutional processes.

A great deal of feminist energy has always been focused around the institutional dimension of analysis on the subject of gender inequalities, ranging from liberal feminist campaigns on women's equality in the public sphere, through socialist-feminist analysis of the relations of production and reproduction and their contribution to women's economic subordination, to radical feminist theories of patriarchy as a linchpin of social organization.[8] While these discussions have been of tremendous importance in detailing and accounting for the subordination of women, and have provided fuel for feminist campaigns, the category of "women" has been used as the relatively unproblematic basis of analysis. Because women themselves were not theorized, such accounts dealt only tangentially with gender identity as such.

Meanwhile, gender-sensitive studies of socialization have provided abundant evidence of just how differential the treatment of boys and girls is from the moment of birth, and how they are expected, encouraged, and coerced into thinking and behaving differently and into developing different skills and priorities.[9] As well as socialization through the family, education, and the workplace, the role of consumption in promoting gender identities was also beginning to be examined in feminist cultural and media-studies literature.[10]

But even supplemented by evidence of differential socialization, feminist institutional theory still tended to leave gender identity itself undertheorized. Such things as the complexity of sexuality; the degree to which the innermost sense of self is gendered; the insecurities and contradictions of masculinity and femininity; and last but not least the continuing complicity of women in their own subordination even after feminist enlightenment—none of these were fully explained by accounts of institutional structures, conditioning, and coercion.

Psychology and Gender Identity

This deficit was made up for by a turn to psychoanalytic theory that, by introducing the unconscious, would provide a depth model of the links between male and female bodies, the institutional arrangement of the family, and the complexities of masculine and feminine character and identity. Unsurprisingly, classic Freudian analysis, which gives the penis a central role in the development of both sexes and supports the view that women are predominantly passive,[11] has gained little support from feminists;[12] instead, two revisionist psychoanalytic schools have been used by feminist scholars. These are, first, feminist object-relations theory, which developed largely in the United States; and second, British and French feminist uses of the Lacanian synthesis of Freud with Saussurean linguistics. While object-relations theory locates the formation of gender identity in a relationship between the institutional and the embodiment dimensions, Lacanian and post-Lacanian scholarship shifts the emphasis away from embodiment altogether and emphasizes the role of language, instead.

In a key move to develop a non-Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, object-relations theory shifted attention away from the penis and focused instead on the role of the maternal bond. In the pre-Oedipal phase, love and identification are undifferentiated. This presents no problem for girls, who may continue to love and identify with their mothers long after they have become aware of their own sex. But boys, in order to develop their sense of maleness, are forced to abandon their attachment to and identification with their mothers. In Nancy Chodorow's account (1978), the absence of a close bond with the father at this stage means that masculinity is defined in reaction to the mother, is defined as that which is not feminine. The more powerful his mother's influence, the more the growing boy struggles to separate from her to establish his own gender identity, the more exaggerated and ag-

gressive his style of masculinity becomes, and the more he fears and abhors the feminine, whether within himself or in relationships with women. Thus while masculinity is overvalued in society, it remains fragile, precarious, and neurotic. This is exactly the right formula for the aggressive psychology needed for male domination and success in a competitive, capitalist world. And thus female power over male children is transformed into male power over adult women.

Arguing in a similar vein, Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) concludes that the exclusive involvement of women in the care of young children and the psychological dynamics that this produces are leading us toward global destruction. The involvement of men in child care, however, would profoundly alter this dynamic, and such involvement is seen as the key to unraveling the oppression of women as well as providing more emotionally satisfactory experiences for antisexist men who see male power as not worth having, given the psychological (or environmental) price to be paid.

Critics of object-relations theory note that it tends to beg rather large questions about the supposed fragility of male gender identities, about the influence of outside power relations on the family, about what happens in nonnuclear families, and about the conventionality and uniformity of mothering and fathering practices. However, perhaps its biggest drawback is that by placing the weight of analysis on mother-child relations, it ignores the wider symbolic power attached to men and masculinity and treats phallocentrism as a product of neurotic male imagination rather than as a cultural reality (Segal 1990, 82). Analysis of gender identity in the object-relations school remains squarely at the institutional pole, and the only institution that is deemed to be relevant is the family.

Language and Psychology

An approach that attempted to introduce symbolic meaning into feminist psychoanalysis was built on the Lacanian synthesis of Freud with Saussure, and was introduced to an English-speaking audience by Juliet Mitchell (1974). Lacan reinterpreted Freudian psychoanalysis as an account of symbolic rather than physical development. The primary processes operating in the unconscious are indistinguishable from linguistic mechanisms because it is language that structures meaning; hence, Lacan saw the Oedipal phase as the negotiation of the child's entry into the symbolic order of language. In

Mitchell's formulation, the development of the unconscious becomes the method through which social and cultural laws are transmitted from generation to generation and by which the paternalistic "law of the father" is reproduced. Following Lévi-Strauss, Mitchell argues that the incest taboo is a universal cultural taboo connected to the (hitherto) universal patriarchal social arrangement whereby women are exchanged between families. Kinship ties and sexual relations both structure society and women's subordinate position in it. The physical significance of the penis is replaced by the linguistic significance of the phallus, a key signifier in patriarchal discourse representing power and desire, which is then encountered by boys and girls in different ways. Metaphor replaces biology as the key element structuring the unconscious, and language is phallocentric. While boys and men have a precarious relationship with the symbolic phallus, which they can never completely embody because it is larger than life, the female sex fares even worse. It exists in Lacanian theory only as a not-whole, a lack, an Other.

Critics of both object-relations and Lacanian psychoanalytic approaches argue that biological essentialism has merely been replaced by psychic or cultural essentialism (e.g., Brennan 1989; Butler 1990a; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). In Chodorow's case, this is because of her ahistorical and ethnocentric assumption of the universality of mothering, and uniform patterns of child care in nuclear families; in Mitchell's case it is because, although culture is embraced as an important influence, it is reduced to a monolithic and universal structure of language and kinship; it is simply inaccurate to assume, for example, that the incest taboo is universal.[13] While accounts such as these may indeed illuminate typical childhood development processes in some specific cultural and historical contexts, they cannot act as general theories because they say little about the development of children's identities outside stereotypically twentieth-century, Western, middle-class nuclear families.

Nor can they explain the development of homosexuality. In this respect Lacanian and object-relations analyses are even more rigid than Freud's original theory. The formation of a gender identity as boy or girl occurs at the same time and through the same processes as sexual orientation is fixed. While heterosexuality is seen as a developmental accomplishment rather than a biological fixture, it is nonetheless a compulsory one. To quote Butler:

> Although the story of sexual development is complicated and quite different for the girl than the boy, it appeals in both contexts to an operative disjunction that remains stable throughout: one identifies with one sex and, in so doing, desires the other, that desire being the elaboration of that identity, the mode by which it creates its opposite and defines itself in that opposition. (Butler 1990b, 332)

Butler argues that this insistence on a singular narrative of development, however complex and contradictory the unconscious is seen to be, makes modern feminist psychoanalytic theories complicit in circumscribing gender meanings, and shoring up compulsory heterosexuality.

Ultimately, in these Anglo-American psychoanalytic models, just as in the earlier sex-role theory, gender identities are constrained by unchanging biology, as the dichotomous division at the level of sex is retained in unitary conceptions of gender. A truly radical separation between the notions of sex and gender would mean that "*man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler 1990a, 6). In practice, however, "once children are given a gender label as either "male" or "female," it is presumed that this monolithic identity adheres through their lives . . . [and] relations between men and women are seen in terms of fixed, polarized identities" (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, 33–34).

In attempts to transcend both the pessimism and universalism of Lacanian analysis, some French post-Lacanian feminists, such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, have moved beyond the linguistic structuralism of Lacan to reconsider the place of the feminine in phallocentric language. They explore ways in which alternative languages based on the logic of the female body (Irigaray 1985) or of the pre-phallocentric, pre-Oedipal experience with (the) mother (Kristeva 1984) might be deployed or recuperated to articulate positive feminine identities. In Kristeva's account, the masculine language of repressive phallocentric symbolism (Lacan's law of the father) and the feminine language of semiotic heterogeneity and joy (the language of pre-Oedipal poetry) are not necessarily attached to male and female bodies at all. However, in spite of their attempts to transcend the straitjacket of structuralism, critics see the writings of Irigaray as reinforcing the ideology of biological essentialism (Butler 1990a, 30), while Kristeva is accused of virtually ignoring both the bodily and institutional dimensions altogether (Segal 1987, 133).

Meanwhile, the analytical distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender has itself come under fire. Although this distinction was useful in combating pervasive biological determinisms, it was the result of an uncritical acceptance of the nature/culture dichotomy of Western philosophy (Harding 1986; Haraway 1991; Bailey 1993). It is important to recognize that nature is itself a man-made category (using both senses of the word *man*) and that science, including biology, is of necessity a cultural activity, with its own cultural history. As Donna Haraway argues, good science is just as embedded in culture as is bad science, and while it may avoid crude reductionism and anthropomorphism, its explanations cannot help but be couched in available metaphor, which is laden with social meanings: "Biology has intrinsically been a branch of political discourse, not a compendium of objective truth. Further, simply noting such a connection between biological and political/economic discourse is *not* a good argument for dismissing such biological argument as bad science or mere ideology" (Haraway 1991, 98).

Haraway charts the parallel and interconnected history of metaphors used in both social science and biology over the course of this century, from the functionalist concept of the body politic, with its parts and pathologies, through the economistic language of scarcity, competition, and natural selection, to the current language of information systems, boundaries, and networks, relating them to developments within capitalism. But while feminists, too, may be trapped within the prevailing metaphors of our age, feminist interventions that produce alternative scientific stories about our bodies can and have been made, and Haraway pleads for more: "To ignore, to fail to engage in the social process of making science, and to attend only to the use and abuse of scientific work is irresponsible. . . . Scientific stories have too much power as public myth to effect meanings in our lives. Besides, scientific stories are interesting" (Haraway 1991, 107).

Recently, feminists have begun to argue that, just as nature is a social category with a history of discursive construction, so are sex, gender, and even the body itself.

Discursive (De)Constructions of Sex and Gender

The feminist literature on the discursive construction of sexed bodies draws heavily on the work of Michel Foucault, who argues that modern power (as opposed to force) is primarily productive and relational rather than oppres-

sive or repressive, that power operates through the construction of particular knowledges, or discourses, and that humans are produced as subjects through the power of discourse.[14] Categorization inevitably proceeds through a process of exclusion, so that the norm is established by defining what it is not, what is Other. Some identities are then marginalized and denied subject status, but marginalization is not the same as oppression.[15] Our bodies are disciplined and normalized by the biopolitics of categorization, normalization, and surveillance (Foucault 1980; Ramazonoglu 1993).

Judith Butler (1990a; 1990b; 1995) uses Foucault as a resource to provide a discursive account of the construction of gender identities that include the body in a nonessentialist way. According to Butler, gender identities are neither true expressions of some ontologically prior self nor the distorted results of a repressed and molded "sex drive." The term *sex* itself is a conflation of chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, and sexual orientation and has no stable meaning. After all, the body itself has no intrinsic meaning outside of our cultural interpretation of its parts. She asks where exactly does sex reside? Is it in our genitals, our chromosomes, our hormones, our brains? Is it possible to have female genitals, male chromosomes, and bisexual desires? What sex does that make you? Perhaps sex does not lie in the body at all, but is the result of the inscription of arbitrary cultural meanings on the body. Sex, as a category—like the categories of male, female, man, woman, masculinity, and femininity—is imbued with power, and inscription is the process by which such categories achieve their solidity, where unstable meanings are "written" on the body. These categories then become naturalized through endless repetition, or "sedimentation," of discursively constituted actions. Thus our understanding of biology itself is merely a set of cultural meanings, but meanings that are literally embodied by us. Our sexed bodies, our gender identities, and our inner sense of self are all material effects of repeated actions within the power/knowledge nexus of discourse. Butler argues that sex is a kind of performance conducted by and on our bodies. It is not an inauthentic performance, however, as there is no such thing as an authentic self inside, no "doer" behind the deed, as it were (Butler 1990a, 25). Our gender identity is not first fixed internally and then manifested externally later, because "a performative act is one which brings into being or enacts that which it names, and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse" (Butler 1995, 134). The performance itself constructs us as gendered beings, constructs our sexuality and gendered identi-

ties. The notion of a psychological core to gender identity is a fantasy or fabrication that serves to hide the regulatory nature of discursive power and preclude an analysis of the political constitution of the gendered subject.

The performative nature of gender and sexuality can be demonstrated through an analysis of gender parody. Butler argues that parody is subversive because it disrupts the normalization of gender divisions, highlights the arbitrary nature of sex and gender, exposes the political constitution of identities, and celebrates discontinuity. It shows that gender coherence is a fabrication and that gender does not follow from sex, nor sex from gender. Drag is a clear example of the power of parody to disrupt apparent gender coherence. In the performance of drag, there is a double inversion. At one and the same time, drag can be seen as a man with the outward appearance of femininity or as a woman trapped in a man's body, and vice versa. This play on the dissonance between anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance

> fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity. . . . Gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is itself an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production, which, in effect, that is, in its effect, postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization, and it deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to essentialist accounts of gender identity. (Butler 1990b, 337–38)

Butler's assertion that there is no clear-cut biological basis for sex can be illustrated by looking at the legal quagmire that surrounds the qualifying terms *male* and *female*. In Britain, sex is usually designated by the midwife, on the basis of presence or absence of a penis at birth. This anatomical designation of sex need not be matched by chromosomes, which form the basis of the current tests for sex in international sporting events such as the Olympics. So one might be legally female and yet be designated male in sporting terms. The possession of a penis is not a consistent marker of maleness—even in Britain, never mind universally across all cultures.

While Butler's approach successfully brings the body back in and articulates a nonessentialist relationship between language and bodies, it suffers

from a number of drawbacks. It is far from clear that everything can or should be reduced to an abstract discussion of discourse. First, Butler replicates Foucault's indifference to the relative power of men over women, so that she cannot specify the processes by which gender *inequalities*, as opposed to neutral and arbitrary constructions, are naturalized (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994, 40). Second, in spite of her claim that "the difficult labour of deriving agency from the very power regimes which constitute us . . . [is] *historical* work, reworking the historicity of the signifier" (Butler 1995, 136), Butler's own rendering of discourse is so abstract as to be devoid of cultural or historical context, so that, in the end, her account becomes as monolithic as the Lacanian structuralism she criticizes. She has ignored the institutional dimension of analysis completely. As Bordo suggests, Butler adopts a linguistic foundationalism that reduces the body to a textual surface, and "biology" to the discursive "product" of sexism and heterosexism. Moreover,

> In this linguistic foundationalism, Butler is very much more the Derridean than the Foucauldian, even though Foucauldian language and ideas dominate the book. Within Foucault's understandings of the ways in which the body is "produced" through specific historical practices, "discourse" is not foundational but is, rather, one of the many interrelated modes by which power is made manifest. Equally, if not more important for him are the institutional and everyday *practices* by means of which our experience of the body is organized. (Bordo 1993b, 291)

The problem of lack of context in Butler's work can be illustrated by examining the subversive potential of parody. Jean Grimshaw argues that obsessive and compulsive housecleaning is a parody of housewifery, but a destructive one in which the sufferer's oppression is increased rather than reduced, so that "parody can sometimes be little more than a defensive structure bred of powerlessness" (Grimshaw 1991, 7). Apart from the importance of context, Grimshaw argues that there is also a narrative element involved, through which the performer makes sense of her performance.

In a more successful use of the discursive approach, paying more attention to context, Denise Riley also deconstructs the unity of "women." Her starting point is that no woman totally identifies with being a woman. A woman's consciousness of being a woman as opposed to some other identity that is ascribed to or claimed by her or will otherwise "take her weight"

(such as being a black, a person, a computer operator, or whatever) waxes and wanes, according to circumstances. In Riley's view, people are inclined to inhabit whichever of the multiple identities proves most applicable to the situation, or useful for the purposes of the moment. Being a woman is a state that fluctuates for the individual. After all "to lead a life soaked in the passionate consciousness of one's gender at every single moment, to will to be a sex with a vengeance—these are impossibilities" (Riley 1988, 6).

However, Riley argues that the fact that identities are not fixed or foundational does not mean that people are cast adrift in a sea of indeterminacy and endless fluidity. In no way does Riley intend her analysis to "vault over the stubborn harshness of lived gender" (3); nor does she necessarily mean it to celebrate "the carnival of diffuse and contingent sexualities" (5). Such directions are an anathema to many feminists, either because of the suggestion that we *can* easily have limitless freedom in our sexual and gender identities—something that is clearly untrue—or because of the suggestion that we *should* have unlimited freedom of the kind that would sanction, say, sex abuse of children. Returning to Butler, we can see that her concept of gender performance does unintentionally lean toward or invite such interpretations, again because of the lack of limiting context.

Riley instead uses the idea of indeterminacy to investigate particular historical variations in the dominant narratives surrounding the term *woman*. She argues that before the seventeenth century, European women were seen to have autonomous souls but women's bodies, which made them physically inferior to men but equal by grace. Gradually, with the process of secularization and the arrival of a new and feminized concept of nature, women's souls and psyches also came to be seen as saturated with their sex, until by the nineteenth century they were virtually seen as a race apart from men. Both the content and strength of female identities changed, over time and in relation to other changing social concepts and institutional developments.

Riley includes the body in her analysis of variations in the intensity and content of gender identity:

> Only at times will the body impose itself or be arranged as that of a woman or a man . . . for the impress of history as well as of individual temporality is to establish the body itself as lightly or heavily gendered, or as indifferent, and for that to run in and out of the eye of "the social." It's more of

> a question of tracing the (always anatomically gendered) body as it is differently established and interpreted as sexed within different periods. (Riley 1988, 103)

This approach to the body allows that it has an extradiscursive reality of basic anatomy, but that the weight and significance attached to this is always discursively and historically constituted.

Looked at historically, it is clear that "women" is an unstable category. Riley considers how feminism should respond to this situation. Rather than assert a mythical, timeless bond of womanhood, or reject the category and risk dissolving the feminist constituency altogether, she argues that feminism is and should be about the metaphorical fighting out of that instability. After all, whether "women" exist or not, the world behaves unambiguously as if they did. Under such circumstances "while it's impossible to be thoroughly a woman, it's also impossible never to be one. On such shifting sands feminism must stand and sway" (114). Riley's approach avoids the pitfall of seeing gender identity as fixed, and yet is sensitive to the history of cultural, material, and institutional restraints on its fluidity. Although her analysis consists of a history of "women," she suggests that a completion of the project would include a similar radical look at the whole category of men, which also would be subject to historical variation (8).

A Multidimensional Approach to Gender Identity

Perhaps in the enthusiasm to embrace discursive approaches, there has been a recent tendency among poststructuralist feminists to dismiss too hastily all earlier feminist theorizing. Critics of earlier feminist theory should remember that radical feminists have always paid attention to the way in which femininity is produced through the manipulation of women's bodies, even if this aspect of gender has been undertheorized in the past (Bordo 1993a). The construction of gender identity is a multidimensional process, dependant neither solely on embodiment, institutional practices, nor discursive formations. As Robert Connell argues:

> The body as used, the body I am, is a social body that has taken on meanings rather than conferred them. . . . The physical sense of maleness is not a simple thing. It involves size and shape, habits of posture and move-

> ment, particular physical skills and the lack of others, the image of one's own body, the way it is presented to other people and the ways they respond to it, the way it operates at work and in sexual relations. In no sense is this all a consequence of XY chromosomes, or even of the possession on which discussions of masculinity have so lovingly dwelt, the penis. The physical sense of maleness grows through a personal history of social practice, a life-history-in-society. . . . The social definition of men as holders of power is translated not only into mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, posture, feel and texture of the body. . . . We may say then that the practical transformation of the body in the social structure of gender is not only accomplished at the level of symbolism. It has physical effects on the body; the incorporation is a material one. (Connell 1987, 83–87)

Identities are not fixed, neither at birth nor in childhood. Connell uses the concept of "personality as practice" (219–36) to illustrate the possibility of lifelong development and change. In this view, gender is neither a thing nor a property of individual character. It is a property of collectivities, institutions, and historical processes. It is also a linking concept, whereby biological difference is engaged with, and social practices are organized in terms of, or in relation to, reproductive divisions. Gender is more properly used as a verb, so that "engendering" is the process of making such links, which may be many and varied and do not have to conform to any social dichotomy (140). It is this view of engendering as a variable process that opens up the possibility of multiple interpretations of gender and gets away from the monolithic assumptions that have dogged so much of the theory so far. On the other hand, there is a macrodimension to gender that prevents such multiplicity from dissolving into voluntarism.

A multiple, multidimensional approach, in which gender identity is theorized in radically historicized accounts of the construction of sexed bodies and gender identities in different cultural contexts, would acknowledge the integration of gender with other ingredients of identity. It has become increasingly difficult to theorize gender identity in isolation from other identities, and the intersections of gender, class, race, and sexuality have become preoccupations of both feminism and cultural studies. The intervention of lesbian, nonwhite, and non-Western voices into the feminist debate has highlighted the heterosexual and racist bias of much earlier feminist writing

and led to debates about double and triple oppressions. The recognition that earlier feminist theory was middle-class, heterosexist, and Eurocentric has forced the issue of differences between women to the center of feminist debates (Harding 1986; Nicholson 1990).[16] Initially, issues of heterosexism, racism, class position, and homophobia were treated as added burdens that some people carry, but it has now become clear that they intersect in the way gender identities are constructed in the first place, so that, for example, gender identities are always already racialized and racial identities are always already gendered (Ware 1992). Whiteness is a racial category as much as blackness is, so that a white, middle-class, heterosexual male is implicated in the mix as much as any other gender identity.

The literature on intersections between gender, race, class, and sexuality and their political significance will be considered in detail in the next chapter. For now it is sufficient to note that one important point to emerge from this literature is that marginalized and oppressed peoples rarely experience their identities as unitary, but rather tend to find them contradictory and confusing. This can be seen as either a disadvantage that needs correction, an opportunity for progressive change, albeit a problematic one, or both. For Seyla Benhabib, fragmented identities are an unwelcome reality. They represent the powerlessness of the marginalized to tell their own stories, to create a personally meaningful life history out of their interactions with the world, rather than having others' perspectives thrust upon them, a situation that would be remedied under the ideal speech conditions of reciprocity and mutual recognition (Benhabib 1992, 198). The problem with this approach is that coherent identities are always constructed on the back of exclusionary practices and therefore can never be available on an equal basis to all, as the pursuers of feminist identity politics have found (Phelan 1989).

For others, the normative embracing of contradictory multiple or mobile identities and weaving them into new kinds of life stories represents an opportunity to bring the marginalized into the center and at the same time move away from fixed-identity politics whose divisions threaten our increasingly complex, contradictory, multicultural societies. Concepts such as hybridization (Hall 1992, 258), and cultural diaspora-ization (ibid.), mestiza consciousness (Mohanty 1991, 36), mobile subjectivities (Ferguson 1993), and nomadic subjects (Braidotti 1994) attempt to capture some of the alternative ways of integrating the self when identification is lived as a multiple process rather than being experienced as a fixed feature of personhood. Giv-

en the explosive possibilities of identity politics in the context of the resurgence of ethnic divisions after the collapse of Communism, together with an ever-shrinking globe, such moves would seem generally progressive, although not without their own pitfalls.[17]

While the privileged and powerful may be more likely to experience their identities as unitary, no identity is truly coherent. As was mentioned earlier, we are all bound up in the configurations of race, class, and sexuality, so that, as Chantal Mouffe argues, any one individual is constituted by an ensemble of "subject positions" that is always contingent and precarious. "Not only are there no 'natural' or 'original' identities, since every identity is the result of a constituting process . . . [but] this process itself must be seen as one of permanent hybridisation and nomadization. Identity is in effect, the result of a multitude of interactions that take place inside a space whose outlines are not clearly defined" (Mouffe 1994, 110).

However, as Kathy Ferguson (1993) points out, provisional political identities are still strategically necessary for political action. Although our class, race, gender, and erotic identifications are themselves constitutions rather than discoveries, it is their very constitution, Ferguson argues, that gives them their political potency.[18] First, while they support a degree of fluidity, such identifications are not infinitely elastic and must depend on some shared experiences. Second, to have any political clout, it is necessary to adopt an identity for strategic reasons—to be recognized and to have a political voice, even if this involves a danger that such identities might solidify because it can be hard to give up even a disadvantaged identity if it provides one with a political voice. Ferguson recommends the conscious adoption of "mobile subjectivities," so that one's sense of self has the quality of a journey or an ever-changing story with a series of stronger and weaker identifications along the way; this, she suggests, would mitigate against the twin dangers of exclusion and sedimentation (Ferguson 1993, 160).

The debate over gender identity has been complex and wide-ranging. Rather than plump for any of the competing theories that center on reproductive biology, institutional and psychological processes, or discursive constructions, this chapter has argued for a multiple and multidimensional approach that can draw on all of these theoretical insights but places them in historical and cultural context.

Gender identity is perhaps best seen as something that is constantly negotiated and renegotiated as we simultaneously engage with our own physical embodiment, participate in social practices, and take up or refuse discursive positions that are enmeshed in a network of power relations whose intricacies are peculiar to our own epoch and culture. Within this framework, the degree and range of choice of gender identities available to us is constrained by the particular conjunction of our bodily possibilities, our material circumstances, and our social position. Therefore gender identities are neither totally self-created nor completely determined, but are subject to historical development and may vary according to context. Nor can they be separated from other factors of identity formation; notably, class, race, and sexuality. Although biology is relevant to gender identity, it is not the foundation upon which our identities are built. Meanwhile, our experiences of gender identity will vary in coherence and intensity, according to circumstances.

In this chapter, I have argued that gender identities are fluid and are always in the process of being produced through the interaction between these three dimensions. In chapter 2, I consider how gender identities relate to gender politics, particularly with regard to men and masculinities.