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THE SOCIOLOGY OF GENDER

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The use of the concept of gender to explain the social differences between males and females is a fairly recent focus in sociology. This is not to say that differences between the two have been ignored by sociologists but that those differences were understood as immutable biological facts and that the social was, in the last instance, powerless to change. The presumed “natural” binary of sex was taken for granted by nineteenth-century and most twentieth-century theorists, for whom men were the primary focus of sociological interest, with women making an appearance usually in discussions of marriage and the family.¹

The relative invisibility of women in the sociological enterprise, as in all Western intellectual traditions, was challenged with the advent of second-wave feminism in the 1960s. The challenge was not confined to the academy. Betty Friedan’s (1963) popular best-seller, *The Feminist Mystique*, and Kate Millet’s (1970) *Sexual Politics* critiqued the oppressive nature of male/female relationships, and the numerous consciousness-raising groups as well as feminist groups that emerged from various left and civil rights organizations also mounted trenchant critiques. Central to the critiques was the conviction that the “personal is political,” that feminist scholarship must be allied to feminist activism. In the academy, the marginality of women to the “intellectual, cultural, and political world” (Smith 1987:1) was contested, and vital interdisciplinary exchanges began the process of putting the natural binary under the microscope (Hess and Ferree 1987).

SEX ROLES

In the early years, research focused on *sex roles* rather than *gender*. Sex as well as class and race were “traditional” variables used in social science research, with the assumption that sex, as a biological given, simply meant checking a box for male or female on government or social science survey forms. Using the concept of sex roles was a way of introducing social and cultural factors into the research. The assumption was that socialization into appropriate male/female roles, although resting on a “natural” biological foundation, allowed, in theory at least, some possibility of social change in the unequal relationships between men and women. But the influential work of Talcott Parsons indicated that there were limitations to the use of role theory. Parsons and Bales (1955) linked sex roles to differences in social functions, with males normatively adopting instrumental functions and females expressive functions. These functional *social* roles were, however, tied to the dictates of a biological binary, and any profound variation in the roles and functions, such as women having careers, was understood to be dysfunctional to the stability of the social system (Parsons [1942] 1954).

Sex-role research was fruitful, however, in producing several empirically based studies on male/female differences (Maccoby and Jacklin 1975), which tended to show that there were no significant differences and that “*women and men are psychologically very similar, as groups*” (Connell 2002:42). Later research refined the concept of sex roles as defining “*situated identities*—assumed and

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relinquished as the situation demands—rather than *master* identities, such as sex category, that cut across situations” (West and Zimmermann 1987:128). It was also pointed out that roles are prescriptive expectations that vary culturally and historically and are not enacted passively; rather, both men and women actively and reflexively shape their sex roles (Connell 1987; Stacy and Thorne 1985). Consequently, the “functional ideas embedded in the concepts of ‘sex role’ and ‘socialization’” were shown to be “inadequate” because people often “do not become what they are expected to be” (Hess and Ferree 1987:14). More significant, critics pointed out that the concept of sex roles could not explain why men were nearly always the more valued members of any social group. In addition, the concept was theoretically problematic because sociologists did not refer to “race roles” or “class roles” (Eichler 1980; Hess and Ferree 1987).

Critiquing the concept of sex roles did not, however, eliminate the problem of the foundational assumption of immutable biological differences, which made the issue of significant change in male/female relationships problematic. In attempting to navigate the nature/nurture binary, Stoller’s (1968) distinction between “sex” as the biological evidence from chromosomes, hormones, and external genitalia and “gender” as the social, psychological, and cultural manifestations was influential. The distinction was initially used in psychoanalytic work on sex and gender “anomalies,” such as hermaphrodites and transsexuals (see Money and Ehrhardt 1972). For feminists, the distinction was a useful way of acknowledging the significance of sex and at the same time freeing them to concentrate on the social elaborations of gender differences. As Dorothy Smith (2002) points out, the distinction was a “political move” because “we had to believe that change was possible, that the repressions to which women were subjected were not the simple effect of biology” (p. ix). For example, Rubin (1975) suggested that the existence of two sexes gave rise to the social organization of gender in kinship systems, which are the “observable and empirical forms of sex/gender systems” (p. 169). Rubin’s analysis retained the assumption of two sexes as foundational, whereas Delphy (1984) maintained that gender precedes sex and that choosing the “bodily type” to explain the hierarchical division of men and women is an arbitrary choice that does not make sense either logically or historically. Biology itself does not necessarily “give birth to gender,” and to assume that it does means that the “existence of genders—of different social positions for men and women—is thus taken as a given and not requiring explanation” (p. 25). It became apparent that the ubiquity of the two-sex model needed to be dismantled if gender was to, as Delphy (p. 24) put it, to “take wing” theoretically.

Before looking at how gender “took wing,” two points need to be made about the following discussion. First, the initial investigations into gender were largely undertaken by feminist researchers. Some male researchers did initiate research on male roles and masculinity, but these

discussions were often marginal to the central feminist debates theorizing gender (Brod 1987; David and Brannon 1976; Farrell 1975; Kimmel and Messner 1989; Pleck 1981). The focus of most research, as the subsequent discussion will illustrate, was mainly on the position of women and their experiences, to the extent that it often seemed that men did not “have” gender, that the universal male subject of Western theory remained intact. The second point has to do with the sex/gender distinction, which will loom large in our discussion. As Donna Haraway (1991:127) discovered, when asked to contribute the sex/gender entry to a feminist keywords text, this is a distinction that other languages and other non-English-speaking feminists do not make. The concept of sex/gender remains a problem for cross-cultural feminist debates, exemplified most recently in the responses to Felski’s (1997) article “The Doxa of Difference” and Hawkesworth’s (1997) article “Confounding Gender” and the responses to Hawkesworth’s article. To the extent that the following concentrates largely on the work of English-speaking feminists, the somewhat contested epistemological status of the sex/gender distinction should be kept in mind.

THEORIZING GENDER

By the late 1970s, gender was the central concept for feminist research, although the issue of “sex” in relation to gender remained contentious. For example, sociobiology maintained that women’s reproductive biological destiny invariably results in social, sexual, political, and economic double standards that favor males (Barash 1977; Dawkins 1976; Wilson 1975). The sociobiological position was not uncontested, but sex became the “Achilles’ heel of 1970s feminism” despite its being relegated to the “domain of biology and medicine” (Fausto-Sterling 2005:1493). In general, gender was used to “supplant sex” but “not to replace it” (Nicholson 1994:80).

In the initial forays into gender research, Marx and Freud were the two theorists whose work provided a basis for critique. Marxist analysis, with its focus on oppression and exploitation, seemed to promise an appropriate revolutionary perspective for change. Both Marx and Engels agreed that the first form of class subordination was the subordination of women to men, and for this reason, Engels (1935) maintained that “in any given society the degree of women’s emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation” (p. 39). Critiquing Freud’s work was seen as a necessity because it provided the psychological theory that supported the idea of universal patriarchy and offered an explanation for women’s compliance with these arrangements. At the same time, Freud’s assumption of pre-Oedipal bisexuality and a common libido offered the possibility of reconceptualizing the development of sexual difference.

Some of the first approaches concentrated on “documenting gender difference” and understanding “how

gender difference is constructed” (Marshall 2000:26). In this context, unpacking the historical and social nature and impact of patriarchy was a central issue. Max Weber ([1925] 1978) had defined patriarchy as the power of “men against women and children; of able-bodied as against those of lesser capability; of the adult against the child; of the old against the young” (p. 359). Following Weber, *patriarchy* was used as a general term denoting the near-universal male domination of women, having its basis in the family and household. Gerda Lerner (1986) pointed out that the foundation for family patriarchy was the control of women’s “sexual and reproductive capacity,” which occurred “*prior* to the formation of private property and class society” (p. 8). Women’s subordination preceded the formation of class societies, so class “is not a separate construct from gender; rather, class is expressed in generic terms” (p. 213).

Although Lerner was at pains to point out that patriarchy was tied to the appropriation of women’s sexual and reproductive capacities, it was class issues filtered through Marx that initially took theoretical precedence in Anglophone sociology. Many feminists pursued the issue of patriarchy through vigorous debates over the connection between patriarchy and capitalism (Barrett 1980; Eisenstein 1979; Firestone 1970; Mitchell 1973; Sargent 1981; Walby 1990). What quickly became clear was that it was not possible to analytically separate the two, that *capitalist patriarchy* formed a unitary system. The debates produced important work on social class (Acker 1973; Giddens 1973; Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Sargent 1981); the nature of women’s labor, especially domestic labor (Fox 1980; Luxton 1980; Oakley 1974; Seccombe 1974); and the variable role of the State in the perpetuation of gendered power relations (Balbus 1982; Coontz and Henderson 1986; Coward 1983; Eisenstein 1979; Elstain 1982; Lowe and Hubbard 1983). In the last context, a considerable amount of work focused on the ways in which gender, class, and race have played out in civic entitlements, especially with respect to welfare benefits (Fraser 1989; Gordon 1994; Marshall 1994; Pateman 1988; Pringle and Watson 1992).

The focus on capitalist patriarchy, however, tended to leave traditional Marxist analyses of productive relations intact and simply added a “separate conception of the relations of gender hierarchy” (Young 1981:49). For example, the domestic labor debates of the 1970s pointed to the usefulness of domestic labor to capital but “became trapped in trying to assess whether housework produced surplus value or was just unproductive labor” (Thistle 2000:286). Furthermore, the dualisms of work/home, public/private appeared not as “mutually dependent but as separate and opposed. It is accordingly, virtually impossible to bring them together within a logically coherent and consistent account of social life” (Yeatman 1986:160). In general, the debates did not displace in practice or in theory what Connell (2002:142) calls the *patriarchal dividend*.² The dividend refers to the very real advantages that men, as a

group, derive from the unequal gender order. These advantages operate at all levels, from the local to the global, whatever the cultural, racial, or social differences. Connell concludes that most men have an interest in “sustaining—and, where necessary, defending—the current gender order” (p. 143).

The concern with class and stratification was also critiqued as ignoring race, ethnicity, and sexuality. The assumption seemed to be that the visibility of gender oppression required the invisibility of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and even class (Mohanty 1992:75). Many women of color, as well as gays and lesbians, correctly identified the way in which earlier discussions had privileged the position and interests of white, Western, heterosexual women, similar to the way in which “man” had been shorthand for white, Western, heterosexual males in post-Enlightenment sociological discourse (Barrett 1980; Collins 1990; hooks 1981; Rattansi 1995).

At the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Women, 1976, the idea of a “global sisterhood” suffering the same gender oppression came under fire, and it was pointed out that many white, privileged Western women were implicated in the patriarchal dividend enjoyed by their male counterparts (Bhavnani 2001). Critics pointed out that gender is constructed in and through differences of “race and class and vice versa” (Lovell 1996:310) and that race is “integral to white women’s gender identities” (Glenn 1992:35).

But recognizing “race” often resulted in black women, Third World women, and native women becoming the trendy “Other.” Ann duCille (1994) asked, “Why have we—black women—become the subjected subjects of much contemporary investigation, the peasants under the glass of intellectual inquiry in the 1990s?” (p. 592). Gayatri Spivak (1988) also critiqued the privileging of “whiteness” as the natural, normal condition that produced the colonial object on the assumption that race is something that belongs to others. A particularly important observation was that many white, Western, academic feminists were complicit in the “othering” process in using “native” informants to “build their academic careers, while the knowledgeable ‘objects of study’ receive nothing in return” (Mihesuah 2000:1250).³

The focus on race was particularly significant to U.S. sociology given its history of race relations. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) conceptualizes the black experience in the United States, in its critical difference from the experiences of “whites,” as embodying an “outsider-within” perspective. She illustrates how African American women have their own take on their oppression and that they are “neither passive victims of nor willing accomplices in their own oppression” (p. xii). Collins points to the significance of everyday practices as the basis for understanding the intersection of race and gender that produces a “Black women’s standpoint,” not a “Black woman’s standpoint,” emphasizing the “collective values in Afrocentric communities” (p. 40, fn. 5).

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In Collins's work and that of others, the key point is that there are multiple and interlocking layers of oppression and domination (see also B. Smith 1983; D. Smith 1987). The "matrix of domination" points to power relations tied to an individual's location on the interrelated structures of gender, race, class, and sexuality (Collins 1990). A significant part of the matrix was a "heterosexual norm" that produced taken-for-granted assumptions about sex, sexual identity, sexual desire, and sexual practice (Blackwood 1994). Sex and the biological binary, always an undercurrent in any of the debates discussed above, took on greater significance as feminists examined how people "have" and "do" gender and how or if, when considering human reproduction, biological essentialism can be avoided.

HETEROSEXUAL NORMALITY AND BIOLOGICAL/SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Feminists recognized that Freud's theories provided psychological support to biological assumptions of "natural" sex differences that, in turn, supported the structural subordination of women under patriarchy (Coward 1983; Mitchell 1975). Jacqueline Rose (1986) suggested that Freud's work gave an "account of patriarchal culture as a trans-historical and cross-cultural force" that "conforms to the feminist demand for a theory which can explain women's subordination across specific cultures and different historical moments" (p. 90). As Jean Walton (2001) points out, psychoanalysis has always excluded race. The reworking of Freud by Lacan and the comments of other theorists such as Foucault and Derrida provided, and continue to provide, significant contributions to these debates (Braidotti 1991; Butler 1990, 1993; Butler and Scott 1992; Diprose 1994; Irigaray 1974; Kristeva 1986; Rose 1986). A key issue addressed was the presumed inevitability of a tie between biological reproduction and social mothering, which, in turn, was tied to the assumption of heterosexual normality. Chrys Ingram (1994) maintains that the idea that "institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements" is one of the "major premises" of sociology in general and of some "feminist sociology" (p. 204). And Rosalind Petchesky (1980) pointed out "women's reproductive situation is never the result of biology alone, but of biology mediated by social and cultural organization" (p. 667).

The significance of reproduction, reproductive choice, motherhood, and mothering was the focus of what has been called maternal feminist debates. Nancy Chodorow's (1978) work was important to these debates. She suggested that while there are historical and cross-cultural variations in family and kinship structures, it is generally the case that women mother. This "mother-monopolized childrearing produces women who are able to *and will want to mother* in their turn" in contrast to men "who have a separate sense of self and who lack the capacity or the desire to nurture others" (Sydie 1987:151). Chodorow's (1978)

object-relations psychoanalytic analysis focuses on the primary, pre-Oedipal identification of both male and female children with the mother and the different ways in which separation occurs for each child. While the son's identification with the father follows the process described by Freud, that of the daughter is different. Chodorow maintains that the daughter, who shares her sex with her mother, does not completely reject the mother, and in her "personal identification with her mother" she learns "what it is to be womanlike" (pp. 175–76). It is not biological sex as such but the "early social object-relationships" located mainly in the unconscious that determine the development of sexed identities and, in the case of women, produce mothers (p. 54).

Masculinity is thus more difficult to achieve and is largely predicted on distinguishing self from the feminine. Dorothy Dinnerstein (1977), whose work parallels Chodorow's in many respects, suggested that both sexes have a terror of "sinking back wholly into the helplessness of infancy" so that for "Mother-raised humans, male authority is bound to look like a reasonable refuge from female authority" (pp. 161, 175). According to Dinnerstein, Freud was unable to account for the near-universal fear and hatred of women, but she maintains that this stance is the logical result of mother-monopolized child rearing, producing the male need to control women and women's more or less willing submission. Both Chodorow and Dinnerstein suggest that the solution is to change the nature of parenting to include both men and women.

The accounts by Chodorow and Dinnerstein were criticized on several counts, not the least of which were the implicit Western nuclear family model they assumed and the lack of clarity as to how men might be incorporated into parenting and what happens if this does occur, for the child's primary identification (Hirsch 1981; Lorber 1981; Spelman 1988). In such a situation, would the identification be bisexual, and if so, what are the consequences? (O'Brien 1981; Sayers 1982). Interestingly, Freud did posit an original bisexuality and common libido in the pre-Oedipal child that the castration fear resolves and that "normally" produces heterosexual gender identities (see Irigaray 1974). In general, it is this assumption of the normality of heterosexuality in these accounts that is a problem. MacKinnon (1982) summarized the heterosexual norm's effects on women as follows: "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away" (p. 515).

Adrienne Rich's (1980) "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" was an influential intervention into the sexuality and maternal feminist debates. Rich claimed that heterosexuality, like motherhood, needed to be "recognized and studied as a *political institution*" (p. 637). She points out that the structures that maintain heterosexuality and the ideology that claims its normality ensures the compliance of most women in their own subordination. Rich asks "*why in fact women would ever redirect that search*"

(p. 637) if women are the primary love object. Her answer is that they are forced to do so because women's identification with women could make them "indifferent" to men, introducing the possibility that "men could be allowed sexual and emotional—therefore economic—access to women *only* on women's terms" (p. 643). Consequently, heterosexuality is something that has to be "imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force," and lesbian existence and the lesbian continuum of "women-identified experience" throughout women's lives has to be denied.

Many of the critiques on the hegemony of heterosexuality looked at its manifestations in and on the body, and about the body as a "text of culture" and a "practical, direct locus of social control" (Bordo 1989:13).⁴ The body as "text" was indebted to Foucault's concept of bio-power and body aesthetics. Other critiques concentrated on the Western conception of the organically discrete, natural, two-sex human body as a social construction (Laqueur 1990; O'Neill 1985; Schiebinger 1993). Donna Haraway (1991) went further in her claim that the naturalized body was a fiction, that bodies must be understood as "biotechnical-biomedical" bodies in a "semiotic system" that produces the "cyborg" as "our ontology" (pp. 150, 211). While not necessarily producing cyborgs, biotechnological and biomedical interventions in reproduction, such as in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, sex selection, and cloning, have been critiqued as not necessarily producing positive outcomes for women's health and their social, political, and economic welfare (Overall 1989; Sawicki 1999; Shildrick and Price 1998).

BODIES, SEX, AND GENDER

Michel Foucault's (1976) conceptualization of the body as the site for the exercise of power through "disciplines of the body and the regulation of populations" and his understanding of power as productive as well as prohibitive and punitive provided an initial entry into the conceptualization of the body as the effect of discourse. In addition, Foucault's demonstration that sexuality has been a "central preoccupation" of modern society that required the confession of a "true" sex identity—male or female, certainly not hermaphrodite—was suggestive. For Foucault, sex was the "naturalised product of a moral code which, through techniques of discipline, surveillance, self-knowledge, and confession organizes social control by stimulation rather than repression" (Foucault 1980:57). But as several feminists pointed out, Foucault's observation that power is all-pervasive and constituted in the practices of the subjected prompts the question, How is resistance possible? (Diamond and Quinby 1988; Fraser 1989; Ramazanoglu 1993; Sawicki 1991). Further, the relations of power/knowledge charted by Foucault may change, but they seem to do so by reaffirming "women's marginal status" (Ricci 1987:24), and there appears to be "no moral high

ground where the individual can exercise agency outside of the social codes which constitute desire asymmetrically" (Diprose 1994:24). Foucault himself was not particularly concerned with the gender of dominated subjects of a power/knowledge regime and did not take account of the "relations between masculinist authority" and, therefore, the gendered "language, discourse and reason" (Diamond and Quinby 1988:xv).

Judith Butler (1990), however, found Foucault's notion of the constructed subject useful. She pointed out that this does not preclude the possibility of the subject's agency; on the contrary, the construction is the "necessary scene of agency" (p. 147). If subjects are discursive productions and identities unstable fictions, then this allows feminists to "contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms." The binaries anyway produce "failures"—the assertive female, the effeminate male, the lipstick lesbian, and so on (p. 145). Gender is not simply constructed; it is performed and performed in relation to the sexual obverse—that is, heterosexual and homosexual bodies and practices are interdependent, produced by the regulative norms of compulsory heterosexuality. Furthermore, gender must be continually reproduced; there is no "original." Nor does anything, performatively, go. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993) points out that the construction and performance of gendered bodies does not mean that some constructions are not necessary constructions. For example, Evelyn Fox Keller (1989) suggests that it is the "vital process that issues in the production of new life" that has compelled "people of all kinds throughout history, and across culture, to distinguish some bodies from others" (p. 316). We may play with, perform, and deconstruct sex and gender, but how can we develop "strategies for eliminating (not only resisting) certain kinds of gendered and sexual subordination and violence, precisely those that are not easily subject to resignification" (Brown 2003:368)? And it is reproduction, and its extension mothering, that seems especially resistant to resignification.

The deconstruction of sex and gender and their manifestations in bodies was important in the development of queer theory and for the increasing focus on the "trans"—transgender, transsexual, intersexuality, bisexuality, and various other "transgressions" of sex and gender dimorphisms (Findlay 1995). More specifically, Eva Sedgwick (1990), in her *Epistemology of the Closet*, claimed that to understand "virtually any aspect of modern Western culture," it is necessary to "incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition" (p. 1).

Queer theory seeks to challenge the "master categories" of heterosexuality and homosexuality as "marking the truth of sexual selves," by understanding them as "categories of knowledge, a language that frames what we know as bodies, desires, sexualities, identities: . . . a normative language that erects moral boundaries and political hierarchies" (Seidman 1994:174). Queer theory also points to the poverty of sexuality studies in mainstream sociology, which has used labeling theory and/or a deviance

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perspective to study gay, lesbian, and alternative “subcultures” (Namaste 1994:227), although Epstein (1994:193) claims that the “involvement of sociologists in the study of sexuality” was a significant subset of mainstream sociology, stemming initially from Kinsey’s work, which has diminished only in recent years.

There has been a veritable explosion of research under the general rubric of queer theory, although much of the work also falls under the general rubric of cultural studies rather than sociology (for a general review of the academic history and current status of queer theory, see Marcus 2005). Steven Seidman (1994) states that although queer theory challenges the “regime of sexuality itself” and “aspires to transform homosexual theory into general social theory or one standpoint from which to analyze whole societies,” to date, “queer theory and sociology have barely acknowledged one another” (p. 174).

A critical issue for queer theorists remains the underlying question of how biology figures in these social constructions. Seeing identities as “multiple, unstable, and regulatory” as well as “pragmatic” and relating this to “concerns of situational advantage, political gain, and conceptual utility” may be a laudable standpoint for the contested social and cultural arena of sex/sexuality/gender studies (Seidman 1994:173). Meanwhile biology, especially evolutionary biology, continues to retain a binary take on physical bodies based on the assumption of natural chromosomal, hormonal, and genital binary difference (Haraway 1991).

Ignoring biology and concentrating on social construction seems to be a misguided position for feminists given the focus of some recent medical research. For example, medicine has searched for gay genes and for differences in brain structures between men and women as well as homosexuals and heterosexuals, and in biology, the studied attempts to deny the existence of “homosexuality” as well as the general “plethora of sex diversity” in the nonhuman animal world persists (Hird 2004). Anne Fausto-Sterling (2005) points out that although contemporary biomedical research seems to deal with sex “in the 1970s feminist meaning of the word, sex sometimes strays into arenas that traditional feminists claim for gender” (p. 1497). Fausto-Sterling concludes with a “call to arms” for feminists to recognize that “culture is a partner in producing body systems commonly referred to as biology” (p. 1516).

Attention to the treatment of the body of the intersexed is one of the ways in which the culture/body relation has been examined in recent years (Heyes 2003; Hird 2000, 2003, 2004; Kessler 1990). According to Hird (2003), the intersexed, defined as “infants born with genitals that are neither clearly ‘female’ nor ‘male,’” (p. 1067) are estimated to comprise up to 2 percent of births. These infants present a “profound challenge to those cultures dependent on a two-gender system,” and intersexed infants are “routinely surgically and hormonally gender reassigned” (p. 1068). The reassignment occurs despite some compelling evidence that for many of these infants, the process

is traumatic and often less than successful in producing a stable gender identity in later years (see Hird 2004:135 on the John/Joan case). A critical point in the definition of and treatment of the intersexed is made by Wilchins, who asks, “Why are [intersex] people forced to produce a binary sexed identity? . . . What kinds of categories of analysis would emerge if nontransgendered anthropological bodies were forced to explicate themselves in terms of intersexuality, rather than the other way around?” (quoted in Hird 2003:1068).

Feminist attention to medical treatments of sex identity is more than warranted given the fact that although medicine “requires a biological definition of the intersexual’s ‘sex,’ the surgeons, endocrinologists and psychiatrists themselves clearly employ a *social* definition” (Hird 2004:136). Kessler (1998) calls medicine’s surgical interventions a “failure of the imagination” in not recognizing that “each of their management decisions is a moment when a specific instance of biological ‘sex’ is transformed into a culturally constructed gender” (p. 32). Furthermore, the insistence on choosing one of two “sexes” is ironic given the fact that the majority of human cells are intersexed, chromosomes have no sex, and there are many species that do not require sex for reproduction. In sum, although the corporeal body in its external fleshy manifestation is important, “beneath the surface of our skin exists an entire world of networks of bacteria, microbes, molecules, and inorganic life,” and they take “little account of ‘sexual difference’” and indeed exist and reproduce without any recourse to what we think of as reproduction” (Hird 2004:142). In addition, the insistence on “identity” as the manifestation of a sovereign “human” subject is compromised by the fact that the Human Genome Diversity Project has shown that humans share the vast majority of their genes with animals, especially with primates. The Genome Project “far from fixing ‘proper’ human identity . . . has shown it to be impure and fluid from the start,” illustrating “profound interconnections and shared genetic identity, with everyone drawing on a common gene pool” (Shildrick 2004:162, 160).

This more recent feminist focus on science, especially biological science, in attempting to sort out sex, sexuality, and gender returns to but confounds the old nature/nurture problem that the sex/gender and biology/social distinctions were to address. The distinctions were initially a fruitful way for feminism to mount important critiques of social-cultural gender inequity, but they were always unstable. Understanding the complexity of our animality is a part of the recognition that dichotomies, in any context, are poor science and poor sociology.

GENDER AND FUTURE RESEARCH: WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

As the discussion above illustrates, the concept of gender has proven to be ambiguous, complex, and contradictory,

and this is unlikely to change in the near future. In the midst of the debates, Chafetz's (1999) point is worth remembering: "All theory pertaining to gender is not feminist, although all feminist theory centers much or all of its attention on gender" (p. 4). There is still a need to unpack the "taken-for-granted assumptions about gender that pervade sociological research, and social life generally" (Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999:xii). For example, Stephanie Knaak (2004) points out that when the "standard 'gender = male/female' variable" is used in research "as the main proxy for gender," this superficial assumption threatens the "overall quality of our research" (p. 312).

There are some directions that might be fruitfully explored in the future, although they by no means exhaust all possibilities; others may have quite different ideas of how to go on in the sociological enterprise. One suggestion is to "bring men back in." Jeff Hearn (2004) suggests that it is

time to go back from *masculinity* to *men*, to examine the hegemony of men and about men. The hegemony of men seeks to address the double complexity that men are both a *social category formed by the gender system* and *dominant collective and individual agents of social practices*. (P. 59)

Hearn points out that "men" are "*formed in men's hegemony . . . and form that hegemony*" and that the individual as well as the collective hegemony of men is reproduced and contested in all societies "both as a social category and in men's practices" (p. 61). Tania Modleski (1991), however, registers a caution with respect to scholars who, under the guise of feminist sympathies, appropriate "feminist analysis" to "negate the critiques and undermine the goals of feminism—in effect delivering us back to a pre-feminist world" (p. 3).

The second direction to explore in greater depth is the way in which control by bio-power is deployed on a global scale as bio-political power. Rather than the disciplined subject "whose behaviour expresses internalized social norms," control, according to Clough (2003), "aims at a never-ending modulation of moods, capacities, affects, potentialities, assembled in genetic codes, identification numbers, ratings profiles and preference listings; that is to say, bodies of data and information (including the human body as information and data)" (p. 360). If sex and gender are deployed as "natural" binaries in national and global statistical reports about "distributed chances of life and death, health and morbidity, fertility and infertility, happiness and unhappiness, freedom and imprisonment"

(p. 361), the use of such information for any emancipatory practices is limited. For this reason, a return to macrolevel stratification theory on the order of Lenski's application of POET—"population, organization, ecology and technology"—as suggested by Huber (2004:259), could be useful.

Gender theorists still contend with "two powerful, mutually canceling truths in feminism: on the one hand, there is no stable sex or gender and on the other, women too often find themselves unable to escape their gender and the sexual norms governing it" (Brown 2003:366). These two conceptions must also contend with the frequent reports of the "death of feminism," most particularly from a variety of conservative, often religiously inspired, traditionalists—both male and female (Hawkesworth 2004). The view from the antifeminist or nonfeminist women must not be simplistically dismissed as "false consciousness"; what is needed is to "know how they think as they do, how and in what terms and with what conflicts they experience their femininity" (Scott 1997:701).

Finally, sociologists as gender theorists need to contend with the tendency of the discipline to marginalize or co-opt gender issues, especially when these issues are linked to systems of inequality in the politics of everyday life (Young 1994). This returns us to the initial starting point of feminist appropriation of gender—the recognition that the concept is a political, economic, and social marker of inequality, whatever its theoretical stability. As Nancy Fraser and Nancy A. Naples (2003) contend, some of the debates in recent feminist theory that tended to see inequities as problems of culture left us "defenseless against free-market fundamentalism" and helped to "consolidate a tragic historic disjunction between theory and practice" (p. 1117). This is particularly troubling given the "acceleration of globalization" and the transformation of "circumstances of justice" by undermining the sovereignty of states. The struggle over governance as "representation" must therefore be added to the "(economic) dimension of redistribution and the (cultural) dimension of recognition."

The above suggestions are but a few that emerge from feminist struggles with the concept of gender. The issues, like all the issues and debates outlined above, are not confined to the disciplinary boundaries of sociology however they may be construed. But if sociology is to have any relevance in the twenty-first century, then gender, as a critical focus of sociological analysis, is important, especially if sociology is to be true to its origins as an engaged political and ethical scientific practice.