

14 FEMINIST AND GENDER THEORIES



Dorothy E. Smith

Key Concepts

- Relations of Ruling
- Bifurcation of Consciousness
- Institutional Ethnography
- Standpoint Theory



Patricia Hill Collins

Key Concepts

- Standpoint Epistemology
- Black Feminist Thought
- Matrix of Domination



Raewyn Connell

Key Concepts

- Hegemonic Masculinity
- Patriarchal Dividend



Judith Butler

Key Concepts

- Queer Theory
- Heterosexual Matrix
- Performativity

There is no original or primary gender a drag imitates, but gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.

—Judith Butler

A Brief History of Women's Rights in the United States

1700s

American colonial law held that “by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in the law. The very being and legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated into that of her husband under whose wing and protection she performs everything.”

By 1777, women are denied the right to vote in all states in the United States.

1800s

In *Missouri v. Celia* (1855), a slave, a black woman, is declared to be property without the right to defend herself against a master's act of rape.

In 1866, the Fourteenth Amendment is passed by Congress (ratified by the states in 1868). It is the first time “citizens” and “voters” are defined as male in the U.S. Constitution.

1900s

In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified. It declares, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

In 1923, the Equal Rights Amendment is introduced in Congress in the United States.

In 1963, the Equal Pay Act is passed by the U.S. Congress, promising equitable wages for the same work, regardless of the race, color, religion, national origin, or sex of the worker. In 1982, the Equal Rights Amendment (which had languished in Congress for fifty years) is defeated, falling three states short of the thirty-eight needed for ratification.

SOURCE: <http://www.legacy98.org/timeline.html>; Jo Freeman, *American Journal of Sociology*, in Goodwin and Jasper (2004).

The brief timeline above underscores an obvious but all too often overlooked point: the experience of women in society is not the same as that of men. In the United States, women's rights have expanded considerably since the nineteenth century, when women were denied access to higher education and the right to own property and vote. Despite major advances, there are still some troubling gender gaps in the United States, however. Women still suffer disproportionately, leading to what sociologists refer to as the "feminization of poverty," where two out of every three poor adults are women. In addition, in contrast to countries such as Sweden where more than 45 percent of elected officials in the national parliament are women, in the United States only about 15 percent of the politicians in the House or Senate are women, placing the United States a lowly sixtieth worldwide in the global ranking of women in politics (www.iwdc.org/resources/factsheet.htm; www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm).

Yet, it was not until 2005 that women in Kuwait were granted the right to vote and stand for election (see Table 14.1), and sadly, as of this writing, women in Saudi Arabia do not yet have those political freedoms. Indeed, in a recent study by Freedom House, Saudi Arabia ranked dead last in all five categories analyzed in terms of women's equality, although in none of the 17 societies of the Arab Middle East and Northern Africa (MEDA) studied do women enjoy the same citizenship and nationality rights as men.¹ In Saudi Arabia, women are segregated in public places, cannot drive cars, and must be covered from head to toe when in public. Men are entitled to divorce without explanation simply by registering a statement to the court and repeating it three times. By contrast, most women not only lack the right of divorce, but because their children legally belong to the father, to leave their husband means giving up their children.

What these latter cases also demonstrate is that the expansion of women's rights does not proceed automatically and must not be taken for granted. Laws that discriminate against women were instituted in the United States in the nineteenth century that had not existed in the previous decades. On a global scale, nowhere was the precariousness of women's rights more evident than when the Taliban radically rescinded them in Afghanistan (1996–2002). Under the rule of the Taliban, women who had previously enjoyed many rights were banished from the workforce, forbidden an education, and prohibited from leaving their homes unless accompanied by a close male relative (www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/timeline/text/qwomen.html).



Photo 14.1 Kuwaiti women press for their full political rights amid crucial parliamentary meeting in March 2005.

In this chapter, we explore the works of four different analysts who take seriously the distinct social situation of women and examine it from various theoretical viewpoints. We begin with the Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith, who provocatively blends neo-Marxist, phenomenological, and ethnomethodological concepts and ideas. We then turn to the work of African American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, who extends the work of Smith by formally situating the variable of race into the critical/phenomenological exploration of class and gender, while also borrowing significantly from postmodernism and recent work on the body and sexuality. The final two theorists featured in this chapter challenge the prevailing sex/gender dichotomy, that is, the

notion that "sex" is the *biological* difference between male and female human animals, while "gender" is the *social* difference between male and female roles or men's and women's personalities (Connell 2002:33). Australian sociologist Raewyn (R. W.) Connell explains how in many ways men and boys are

¹For instance, in no country in the region is domestic violence outlawed, and some laws, such as those that encourage men who rape women to marry their victims, even condone violence against women.

gatekeepers of gender equality. While in accordance with postmodern lines of thought, the American philosopher Judith Butler challenges the very binary categories that we use to think about both gender and sexual orientation.²

Table 14.1 International Women’s Suffrage Timeline

• 1893 New Zealand	• 1950 India
• 1902 Australia ¹	• 1954 Colombia
• 1906 Finland	• 1957 Malaysia, Zimbabwe
• 1913 Norway	• 1962 Algeria
• 1915 Denmark	• 1963 Iran, Morocco
• 1917 Canada ²	• 1964 Libya
• 1918 Austria, Germany, Poland, Russia	• 1967 Ecuador
• 1919 Netherlands	• 1971 Switzerland
• 1920 United States	• 1972 Bangladesh
• 1921 Sweden	• 1974 Jordan
• 1928 Britain, Ireland	• 1976 Portugal
• 1931 Spain	• 1989 Namibia
• 1944 France	• 1990 Western Samoa
• 1945 Italy	• 1993 Kazakhstan, Moldova
• 1947 Argentina, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan	• 1994 South Africa
• 1949 China	• 2005 Kuwait

SOURCE: Information Please® Database, © 2005 Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved. (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0931343.html>)

Note: Two countries do not allow their people, male or female, to vote: Brunei and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia is the only country with suffrage that does not allow its women to vote.

¹Australian women, with the exception of aboriginal women, won the vote in 1902. Aboriginals, male and female, did not have the right to vote until 1962.

²Canadian women, with the exception of Canadian Indian women, won the vote in 1917. Canadian Indians, male and female, did not win the vote until 1960. *Source: The New York Times*, May 22, 2005.

²To be sure, feminism has never been a unified body of thought, and there are various ways that feminisms and feminist theorists can be contemplated. One of the most common is according to political/ideological orientation. According to this approach (which typically equates “feminism” with “feminist theory”), “liberal feminists,” such as Betty Friedan, focus on how political, economic, and social rights can be fully extended to women within contemporary society; while “radical feminists,” such as Andrea Dworkin (1946–2005) and Catharine MacKinnon (1946–), most famous for their proposal for a law that defined pornography as a violation of women’s civil rights (thereby allowing women to sue the producers and distributors of pornography in a civil court for damages), view women as an oppressed group, who, like other oppressed peoples, must struggle for their liberation against their oppressors—in this case, men. However, here we consider feminists largely in terms of their theoretical orientation rather than political/ideological commitment, because we view the former as *prior to* the latter (Alexander 1987:7). As discussed in Chapter 1, theoretical presuppositions are, by definition, simply the most basic assumptions that theorists make as they go about thinking and writing about the world (ibid.:12).

■ DOROTHY E. SMITH (1926–): A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dorothy E. Smith was born in Great Britain in 1926. She worked at a variety of jobs and was a secretary at a publishing company before she decided to enhance her employment prospects by attaining a college degree. She began college at the London School of Economics in 1951, and she received her bachelor's degree in sociology from the London School of Economics in 1955. She and her husband then decided to both go on to graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley. Smith maintains that although her years at Berkeley were in many ways the unhappiest of her life, she learned a lot, both inside and outside the classroom (<http://sociology.berkeley.edu/alumni/>). Through “the experience of marriage . . . and the arrival of children, and the departure of her husband rather early one morning,” she learned about the discrepancy between social scientific description and lived experience (1979:151). Through courses in survey methods and mathematical sociology, she learned a type of sociological methodology that she would come to reject, but with which would come to formulate her own opposing methodology. Through a wonderful course taught by Tamotsu Shibutani, she gained a deep appreciation for George Herbert Mead, which “laid the groundwork for a later deep involvement with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty” (http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/mdevault/dorothy_smith.htm).

After completing her doctorate in sociology in 1963, Smith worked as a research sociologist and lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley. At times, she was the only woman in the UC Berkeley Department of Sociology. Deeply moved by the newly emerging women's movement, Smith organized a session for graduate students to “tell their stories” about gender inequities in academia (of which “there were many”) (http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/mdevault/dorothy_smith.htm).

By the late 1960s, Smith's marriage had fallen apart, and lacking day care and family support, she returned home to England to raise her children and teach. She became a lecturer in sociology at the University of Essex, Colchester. Several years later, Smith accepted a full-time position at the University of British Columbia, and it was here that Smith's feminist transformation (which had begun in Berkeley) deepened. Smith taught one of the first women's studies courses, and the lack of existing materials gave her impetus to “go from the kind of deep changes in my psyche that accompanied the women's movement to writing those changes into the social” (ibid.). Smith also helped create a women's action group that worked to improve the status of women “at all levels of the university,” and she was involved in establishing a women's research center in Vancouver outside the university that would provide action-relevant research to women's organizations (ibid.). Smith also edited a volume providing a feminist critique of psychiatry (*Women Look at Psychiatry: I'm Not Mad, I'm Angry*, 1975), and she began to reread Marx and integrate Marxist ideas into her work, as is reflected in her pamphlet *Feminism and Marxism, a Place to Begin, a Way to Go* (1977).³

In 1977, Smith became a professor in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Here Smith published the works for which she is most well known, including *A Sociology for Women* (1979), *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987), *The Conceptual Practices of Power* (1990a), *Texts, Facts, and Femininity* (1990b), *Writing the Social* (1999), and most recently, *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* (2005). In these works, Smith exhorts a powerful feminist theory of what she calls relations of ruling, and she sets out her own approach, which she calls institutional ethnography, as a means for building knowledges as to how the relations of ruling operate from the standpoints of the people participating in them. These pivotal ideas are discussed further later in the chapter.

Smith continues to be an active teacher and scholar. As professor emerita in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto and an adjunct professor in the Department of Sociology, University of Victoria, British Columbia, she continues to educate and inspire a new generation of scholars dedicated to

³Interestingly, Smith (1977:9) maintains that although she worked as a socialist when she was a young woman in England, it was not until she reread Marx in the 1970s that she came to really understand what Marx meant.

institutional ethnography (see, for instance, Marie Campbell and Ann Manicom, eds., *Experience, Knowledge and Ruling Relations: Explorations in the Social Organization of Knowledge*, University of Toronto Press, 1995).

SMITH'S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES AND CORE IDEAS ■

Although Dorothy Smith has written on a wide variety of topics, including education, Marxism, the family, mental illness, and textual analysis, she is most well known as one of the originators of **standpoint theory**.⁴ Smith uses the notion of standpoint to emphasize that what one knows is affected by where one stands (one's subject position) in society. We begin from the world as we actually experience it, and what we know of the world and of the "other" is conditional upon that location (Smith 1987). Yet, Smith's argument is not that we cannot look at the world in any way other than our given standpoint. Rather, her point is that (1) no one can have complete, objective knowledge; (2) no two people have exactly the same standpoint; and (3) we must not take the standpoint from which we speak for granted. Instead, we must recognize it, be reflexive about it, and problematize it. Our situated, everyday experience should serve as a "point of entry" of investigation (Smith 2005:10).

Put in another way, the goal of Smith's feminist sociology is to explicitly reformulate sociological theory by fully accounting for the standpoint of gender and its effects on our experience of reality. Interestingly, it was Smith's particular standpoint as a female in a male-dominated world, and specifically as simultaneously a wife and mother and a sociology graduate student in the 1960s, that led her to the formulation of her notion of standpoint. By overtly recognizing the particular standpoint from which she spoke, Smith was bringing to the fore the extent to which the issue of standpoint had been unacknowledged in sociology. This point is quite ironic, really. Sociology was explicitly set out as the "scientific" and "objective" study of society when it first emerged as a discipline in the nineteenth century; but because its first practitioners were almost exclusively men, it implicitly assumed and reflected the relevancies, interests, and perspectives of (white, middle-class) European males.⁵ "Its method, conceptual schemes and theories had been based on and built up within the male social universe" (Smith 1990a:23).

The failure to recognize the particular standpoints from which they spoke not only left sociologists unaware of the biases inherent to their position. In addition, by implicitly making the discipline of sociology a masculine sociology—that is, by focusing on the world of paid labor, politics, and formal organizations (spheres of influence from which women have historically been excluded) and erasing or ignoring women's world of sexual reproduction, children, household labor, and affective ties—sociology unwittingly served as a vehicle for alienating women from their own lives (Seidman 1994:212–13). This is the irony mentioned previously: at the same time that sociology emerged as provocative new discipline dedicated to explaining the inequalities and systems of stratification at the heart of various societies (especially apparent, for instance, in Marx and Weber), it created its own version of domination by shifting attention almost exclusively to one particular dimension of human social life—the masculine-dominated macrolevel public sphere—at the expense of another (the world of women).

In short, Smith underscores not only that the standpoint of men is consistently privileged and that of women devalued, but that the standpoint of the (white) male upper-class pervades and *dominates* other

⁴The term "feminist standpoint theory" was actually not coined by Smith. Rather, feminist standpoint theory (and hence "standpoint theory") is traced to Sandra Harding (1986), who, based on her reading of the work of feminist theorists—most important, Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartstock, and Hilary Rose—used the term to describe a feminist critique beyond the strictly empirical one of claiming a special privilege for women's knowledge, and emphasizing that knowledge is always rooted in a particular position and that women are privileged epistemologically by being members of any oppressed group (Smith 2005:8). See also Harding (2004).

⁵Although Smith did not focus on race, as you will shortly see, Patricia Hill Collins built on Smith's work by illuminating how race is intertwined with gender and class standpoints.

worldviews. This idea, that not all standpoints are equally valued and accessed in society, clearly reflects Smith's critical/Marxist roots. As discussed previously, beginning with her pamphlet *Feminism and Marxism* (1977), Smith explicitly links her feminism with Marxism. She explains how "objective social, economic and political relations . . . shape and determine women's oppression" (ibid.:12). She focuses on "the relations between patriarchy and class in the context of the capitalist mode of production" (1985:1) and emphasizes how "the inner experiences which also involved our exercise of oppression against ourselves were ones that had their location in the society outside and originated there" (1977:10).

Yet, Smith's feminist theory is not just derived from an application of Marx to the issue of gender; rather, it reflects Smith's phenomenological roots (see Chapter 13) as well. Specifically, Smith links a neo-Marxist concern about structures of domination with a phenomenological emphasis on consciousness and the active construction of the taken-for-granted world. She explicitly demonstrates the extent to which men and women bracket and view the world in distinctive ways, in conjunction with their distinct, biographically articulated lifeworlds. In her own case, for instance, Smith recognizes that she experienced "two subjectivities, home and university" that could not be blended, for "they ran on separate tracks with distinct phenomenal organization" (Smith 2005:11). "Home was organized around the particularities of my children's bodies, faces, movements, the sound of their voices, the smell of their hair . . . and the multitudes of the everyday that cannot be enumerated," while the "practice of subjectivity in the university excluded the local and bodily from its field" (ibid.:12). In this way, Smith (1987:83–84) notes that female-dominated work in the concrete world of the everyday demands one to be attuned to the sensory experiences of the body. "Here there are textures and smells. . . . It has to happen here somehow if she is to experience it at all" (1987:82). The abstract world of the professions, on the other hand, requires an individual to take this level of experience for granted.

Smith is particularly indebted to the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (see Chapter 13). Recall that it was Schutz (1970:11, as cited in Smith 1987:83) who argued that we put various levels of our personality "in play" in various provinces of reality. Schutz used the term *mitwelt relations* to refer to relations in which individuals are experienced as "types" (e.g., the relationship between you and the person who delivers your mail), and he used the term *umwelt relations* to refer to more intimate face-to-face relations. According to Schutz, in contrast to *mitwelt relations*, in *umwelt relations* each person must be aware of the other's body as a field of expression that fosters the development of intersubjectivity.

Smith (1987:83) extends Schutz's distinction between *umwelt* and *mitwelt* relations by asserting that "if men are to participate fully in the abstract mode of action, they must be liberated from having to attend to their needs in the concrete and particular." That is, traditionally not only are *umwelt relations* more central in women's lives, but men *relegate* their *umwelt relations* to women (for instance, a boss has his secretary shop for an anniversary present for his wife and make his personal calls). Thus, Smith argues that "women's work conceals from men the actual concrete forms on which their work depends" (ibid.:83–84).

This brings us to Smith's concept of **bifurcation of consciousness**. Smith uses this term to refer to a separation or split between the world as you actually experience it and the dominant view to which you must adapt (e.g., a masculine point of view). The notion of bifurcation of consciousness underscores that subordinate groups are conditioned to view the world from the perspective of the dominant group, since the perspective of the latter is *embedded* in the institutions and practices of that world, while the dominant group, on the other hand, enjoys the privilege of remaining oblivious to the worldview of the Other, or subordinate group, since the Other is fully expected to accommodate to them. The "governing mode" of the professions, then, creates a bifurcation of consciousness in the actor: "It establishes two modes of knowing, experiencing, and acting—one located in the body and in the space that it occupies and moves into, the other passing beyond it" (1987:82).

Of course, bifurcation of consciousness reflects Smith's own experience of living in "two worlds": the dominant, masculine-oriented, "abstract" world of the sociologist and the "concrete" world of wife and mother. The key point, as Smith (2005:11) notes, is that "the two subjectivities, home and university, could not be blended." In this way, Smith's concept of bifurcation of consciousness recalls W. E. B. Du Bois's

concept of “double consciousness,” which he used to describe the experiential condition of black Americans.⁶ In both cases, it is the oppressed person who must adapt to the “rules of the game” that do not reflect her interests or desires, even though, in both cases, the dual subjectivities provide a uniquely “clairvoyant” vantage point (in Du Bois’s terms). Thus, for instance, women in male-dominated professions (e.g., law enforcement, construction) acclimate themselves to sexist and even misogynistic talk about the female body that is a normal part of their everyday work environment. Not only do they learn to ignore the banter; indeed, they might even chime in. However, because they must continually accommodate themselves to the dominant group in order to gain acceptance in a world that is not theirs, members of oppressed or minority groups become alienated from their “true” selves.

Thus far we have discussed Smith’s dual neo-Marxist and phenomenological roots. There is also an important discursive bent in Smith’s work that has become especially apparent in the last decade, however. In conjunction with the poststructuralist turn (see Chapter 15), Smith emphasizes that in modern, Western societies social domination operates through *texts* (such as medical records, census reports, psychiatric evaluations, employment files) that facilitate social control. Thus, Smith (1990b:6) describes **relations of ruling** as including not only forms such as “bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization and media” but also “the complex of discourses, scientific, technical, and cultural, that intersect, interpenetrate, and coordinate” them. Smith (1987:4) maintains that behind and within the “apparently neutral and impersonal rationality of the ruling apparatus” is concealed a “male subtext.” Women are “excluded from the practices of power within textually mediated relations of ruling” (ibid.). Thus, for instance, official psychiatric evaluations replace the individual’s actual lived experience with a means for interpreting it; the individual becomes a case history, a type, a disease, a syndrome, and a treatment possibility (Seidman 1994:216).

Smith goes on to suggest that because sociology too relies on these same kinds of texts, it too is part and parcel of the relations of ruling. The subject matter and topics of sociology are those of the ruling powers. Sociological knowledge receives its shape less from actualities and the lived experiences of real individuals than from the interests in control and regulation, by the state, professional associations, and bureaucratization (Seidman 1994:216).

Most important, Smith does not just criticize modern, “masculinist” sociology; she provides an alternative to it. Inspired by Marx’s historical realism but also drawing on ethnomethodology—which, as discussed in Chapter 13, considers that practical activities, practical circumstances, and practical sociological reasoning must not be taken for granted but rather be topics of empirical study (Garfinkel 1967:1)—Smith advocates a “sociology for women” that begins “where women are situated”: in the “particularities of an actual, everyday world” (Smith 1987:109). Smith’s sociology for women aims not to “transform people into objects” but to “preserve their presence as subjects” (1987:151). Smith (1987:143) argues that the “only route to a faithful telling that does not privilege the perspectives arising in the sites of her sociological project and her participation in a sociological discourse is to commit herself to an inquiry that is ontologically faithful, faithful to the presence and activity of her subjects and faithful to the actualities of the world that arises for her, for them, for all of us, in the ongoing co-ordering of our actual practices.”⁷

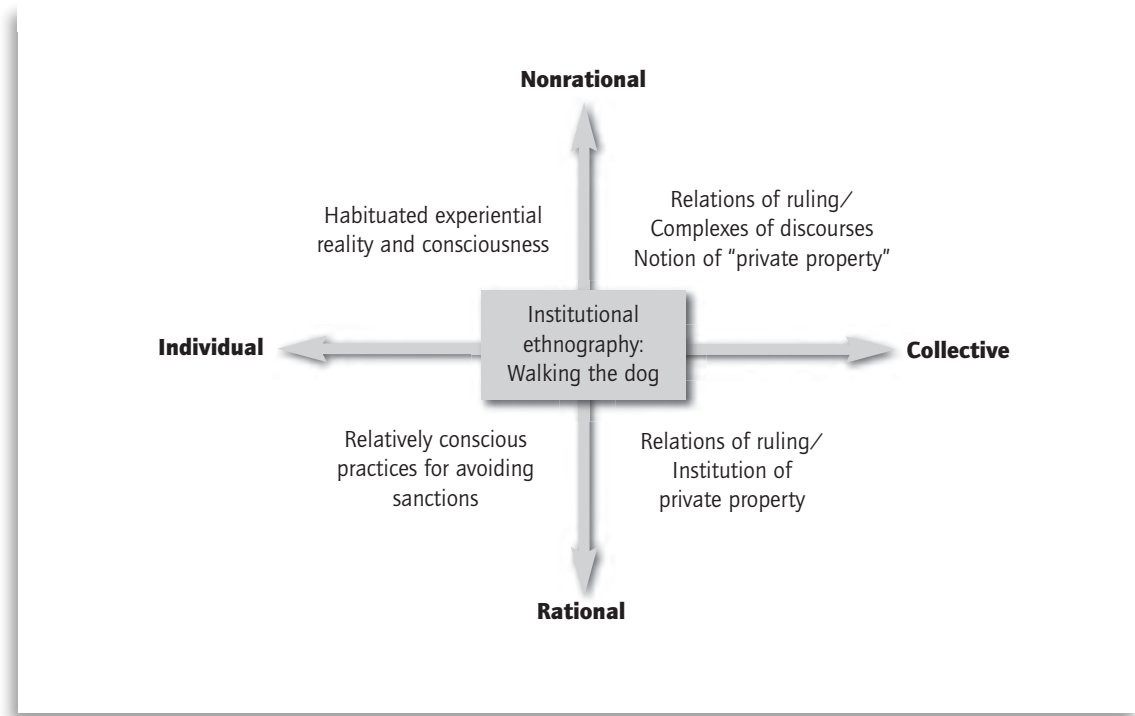
Smith calls her particular approach **institutional ethnography**. Institutional ethnography is a method of elucidating and examining the relationship between everyday activities and experiences and larger institutional imperatives. Interestingly, the very term “institutional ethnography” explicitly couples an

⁶See Edles and Appelrouth (2005:323–25).

⁷In her most recent book, Smith (2005) updates her terminology by replacing the notion of “a sociology for women” with that of “a sociology for people.” In other words, the notion of “a sociology for women” can be understood as reflecting a particular historical era in which feminists called attention to the fact that the standpoint of women was absent in the academy; however, today the more pertinent (and more postmodern) point is that we must begin wherever we are, that is, not only in terms of “gender” but also class, race, sexual orientation, ablebodiedness, and so on. This is institutional ethnography.

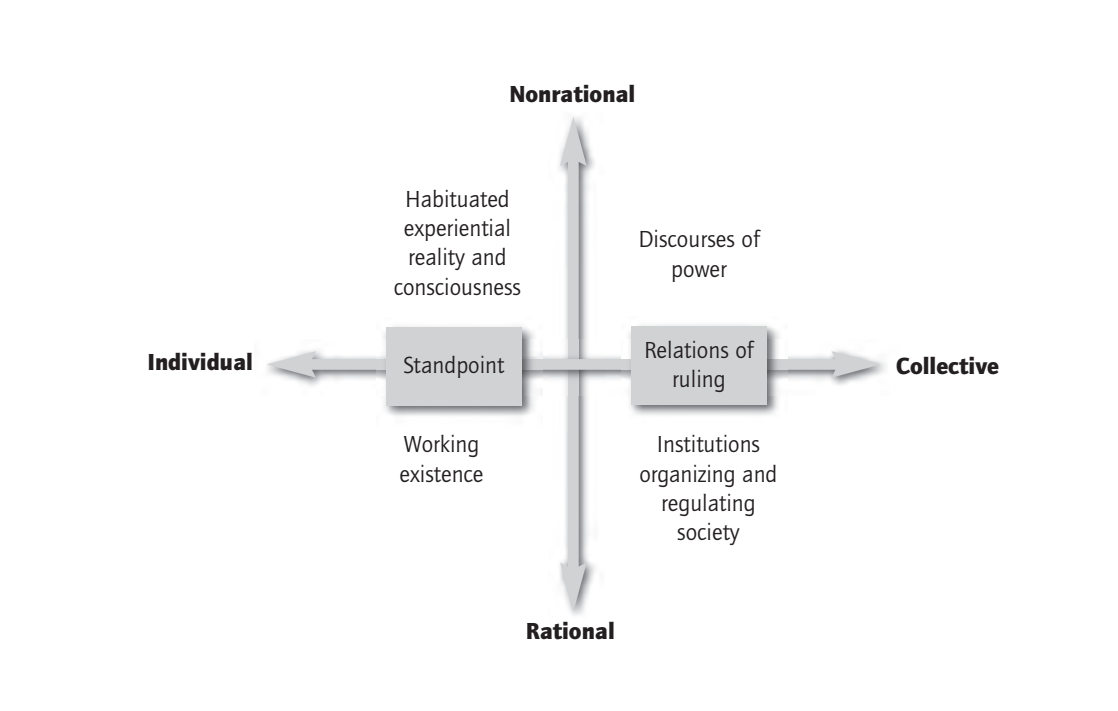
emphasis on structures of power (“institutions”) with the microlevel practices that make up everyday life (“ethnography”). Smith’s point, of course, is that it is in microlevel, everyday practices at the level of the individual that collective, hierarchical patterns of social structure are experienced, shaped, and reaffirmed. For instance, in one passage you will read, Smith explains how the seemingly benign, everyday act of walking her dog actually reaffirms the class system. As Smith “keeps an eye on her dog” so that it does its business on some lawns as opposed to others, she is, in fact, “observing some of the niceties of different forms of property ownership” (renters versus owners) (1987:155); she is participating in the existing relations of ruling. This point is illustrated in Figure 14.1.

Figure 14.1 Smith’s Concept of Institutional Ethnography: Walking the Dog



■ SMITH’S THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Smith’s theoretical approach is explicitly multidimensional, as can be readily seen in her central concepts (see Figures 14.1 and 14.2). For instance, as discussed above, the term “institutional ethnography” explicitly reflects Smith’s dual emphasis on collective structures of ruling and the institutionalization of power and their actual workings at the level of the individual in everyday life. In terms of action, as shown in Figure 14.1, institutional ethnography can be said to reflect a rationalistic emphasis on practical action both at the level of the individual and at the collective level of the institution; however, clearly Smith’s phenomenological roots lead her to appreciate the nonrational motivation for action as well. Above all, Smith emphasizes that taken-for-granted, subjective categories provide the backdrop for the pragmatic performances that constitute the everyday world and, in doing so, reaffirm the existing structural order. For instance, in the example above, it is only because of her internalization of taken-for-granted notions of class and private property that Smith knows how and where to walk her dog. In Schutz’s terms, she uses specific “recipes” (see Chapter 13) and taken-for-granted habits, which, by definition, work at the individual/nonrational level.

Figure 14.2 Smith's Concepts of "Standpoint" and "Relations of Ruling"

So, too, the term “standpoint” reflects Smith’s dual rational and nonrational approach to action and individual and collective approach to order, in that “standpoint” refers both to our objective (rational) position and subjective (nonrational) position in the (collective) social hierarchy, and to our unique biographical (individual) situation. For instance, as shown in Figure 14.2, my “standpoint” as a mother is rooted at once in the *meaning* (including social status or honor) accorded to “mothers” in general in our society, as determined by the complexes of discourses that are part of relations of ruling (collective/nonrational), and the specific reward structure accrued to that position by the (collective/rational) institutions organizing and regulating society (collective/rational) as well. That said, above all, “standpoint” reflects the specific attitudes, emotions, and values that I experience and internalize at the level of the individual (individual/nonrational) as well as the habituated day-to-day experience, and the particular strategic advantages and disadvantages I am able to accrue through this position and my mundane working existence (individual/rational).

Put in another way, Smith articulates not only how individuals unthinkingly “do” gender (and class) in daily life at the individual/nonrational level, but also the subjective categories that make this possible, that is, the taken-for-granted subjective understandings of what it means to be a “boy” or a “girl” that reflect the collective, nonrational realm. Akin to Schutz and Berger and Luckmann (see Chapter 13) as well as the poststructuralists who emphasize discourse and are discussed in the next chapter, Smith continually emphasizes that gender cannot be “done” at the individual level in everyday life without taken-for-granted conceptualizations at the collective level.

In a similar vein, that Smith’s concept “relations of ruling” encompasses both such forms as “bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization and media” and scientific, technical, and cultural discourses reflects the collective/rational and collective/nonrational realms, respectively (see Figure 14.2). Specifically, that Smith defines ruling relations as “objectified forms of consciousness and organization, *constituted externally to particular places and people*” (2005:227,

emphasis added) clearly reflects her collectivistic orientation to order. And although Smith also underscores that ruling relations refer to “that total complex of activities, differentiated into many spheres . . . through which we are ruled and through which we, and I emphasize this *we*, participate in ruling” (Smith 1990a, as cited in Calhoun 2003:316), which indicates an acknowledgment of individual agency, that “forms of consciousness are created that are properties of organization or discourse *rather than of individual subjects*” (1987:3, emphasis added) clearly reflects a collectivistic approach to order. This dual rational/nonrational approach to action and collectivistic approach to order inherent in Smith’s concept of relations of ruling is illustrated in Figure 14.2. Interestingly, then, taken together Figures 14.1 and 14.2 illustrate that the multidimensionality of the concept of institutional ethnography is a function of its incorporation of the more individualistic concept of standpoint and the more collectivistic concept of ruling relations.

Readings

Introduction to *Institutional Ethnography*

In this excerpt from her most recent book, *Institutional Ethnography* (2005), Smith explicitly defines “institutional ethnography” and explains how she came to formulate this unique method of inquiry. In addition, Smith explains the historical trajectory of gender and relations of ruling, that is, how the radical division between spheres of action and of consciousness of middle-class men and women came to emerge. As indicated previously, it is precisely this conceptualization of relations of ruling (or ruling relations) as not simply modes of domination but also forms of *consciousness* that forms the crux of Smith’s work.

Institutional Ethnography (2005)

Dorothy Smith

WOMEN’S STANDPOINT: EMBODIED KNOWING VS. THE RULING RELATIONS

It’s hard to recall just how radical the experience of the women’s movement was at its inception for those of us who had lived and thought within the masculinist regime against which the movement struggled. For us, the struggle was as much within ourselves, with what we knew how to do and think and feel, as with that regime as an enemy outside us. Indeed we ourselves had participated however passively in that regime. There was no developed discourse in which

the experiences that were spoken originally as everyday experience could be translated into a public language and become political in the ways distinctive to the women’s movement. We learned in talking with other women about experiences that we had and about others that we had not had. We began to name “oppression,” “rape,” “harassment,” “sexism,” “violence,” and others. These were terms that did more than name. They gave shared experiences a political presence.

Starting with our experiences as we talked and thought about them, we discovered depths of alienation and anger

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that were astonishing. Where had all these feelings been? How extraordinary were the transformations we experienced as we discovered with other women how to speak with one another about such experiences and then how to bring them forward publicly, which meant exposing them to men. Finally, how extraordinary were the transformations of ourselves in this process. Talking our experience was a means of discovery. What we did not know and did not know how to think about, we could examine as we found what we had in common. The approach that I have taken in developing an alternative sociology takes up women's standpoint in a way that is modeled on these early adventures of the women's movement. It takes up women's standpoint not as a given and finalized form of knowledge but as a ground in experience from which discoveries are to be made.

It is this active and shared process of speaking from our experience, as well as acting and organizing to change how those experiences had been created, that has been translated in feminist thinking into the concept of a feminist standpoint—or, for me, women's standpoint. However the concept originated, Sandra Harding (1988) drew together the social scientific thinking by feminists, particularly Nancy Hartsock, Hilary Rose, and myself, that had as a common project taking up a standpoint in women's experience. Harding argued that feminist empiricists who claimed both a special privilege for women's knowledge and an objectivity were stuck in an irresolvable paradox. Those she described as "feminist standpoint theorists" moved the feminist critique a step beyond feminist empiricism by claiming that knowledge of society must always be from a position in it and that women are privileged epistemologically by being members of an oppressed group. Like the slave in Hegel's parable of the master-slave relationship, they can see more, further, and better than the master precisely because of their marginalized and oppressed condition. She was, however, critical of the way in which experience in the women's movement had come to hold authority as a ground for speaking, and claiming to speak truly, that challenged the rational and objectified forms of knowledge and their secret masculine subject. Furthermore, feminist standpoint theory, according to Harding, implicitly reproduced the universalized subject and claims to objective truth of traditional philosophical discourse, an implicit return to the empiricism we claimed to have gone beyond.

The notion of women's standpoint—or indeed the notion that women's experience has special authority—has also been challenged by feminist theorists. It fails to

take into account diversities of class and race as well as the various forms and modulations of gender. White middleclass heterosexual women dominated the early phases of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, but soon our, and I speak as one, assumptions about what would hold for women in general were challenged and undermined, first by working-class women and lesbians, then by African-North American, Hispanic, and Native women. The implicit presence of class, sexuality, and colonialism began to be exposed. Our assumptions were also challenged by women in other societies who experience wasn't North American, by women such as those with disabilities and older women whose experience was not adequately represented and, as the women's movement evolved over time, by younger women who have found the issues of older feminists either alien or irrelevant.

The theoretical challenge to the notion of women's standpoint has been made in terms of its alleged essentialism. It has been seen as essentialist because it excludes other bases of oppression and inequity that intersect with the category "women." The critique of essentialism, however, assumes the use of the category "women" or "woman" to identify shared and defining attributes. While essentialism has been a problem in the theorizing of *woman*, it cannot be extended to all uses of such categories. In practice in the women's movement, the category has worked politically rather than referentially. As a political concept, it coordinates struggle against the masculinist forms of oppressing women that those forms themselves explicitly or implicitly universalize. Perhaps most important, it creates for women what had been missing, a subject position in the public sphere and, more generally, one in the political, intellectual, and cultural life of the society.

Claiming a subject position within the public sphere in the name of women was a central enterprise of the women's movement in its early days in the 1970s and 1980s. A powerful dynamic was created. While those making the claim first were white middle-class women, the new subject position in public discourse opened the way for others who had found themselves excluded by those who'd gone before. Their claims were positioned and centered differently, and their own experience became authoritative. It is indeed one of the extraordinary characteristics of the women's movement that its continual disruption, its internal struggles against racism and white cultural dominance, its internal quarrels and angers, have been far from destructive to the movement. On the contrary, these struggles in North

America and Europe have expanded and diversified the movement as women other than those with whom it originated gave their own experiences voice.

WOMEN'S STANDPOINT AND THE RULING RELATIONS

Standpoint is a term lifted out of the vernacular, largely through Harding's innovative thinking and her critique (1988), and it is used for doing new discursive work. Harding identifies standpoint in terms of the social positioning of the subject of knowledge, the knower and creator of knowledge. Her own subsequent work develops an epistemology that relies on a diversity of subject positions in the sociopolitical-economic regimes of colonialism and imperialism. The version of standpoint that I have worked with, after I had adopted the term from Harding (previously I'd written of "perspective"; D. E. Smith (1974a), is rather different. It differs also from the concept of a feminist standpoint that has been put forward by Nancy Hartsock (1998) in that it does not identify a socially determined position or category of position in society (or political economy).¹ Rather, my notion of women's (rather than feminist) standpoint is integral to the design of what I originally called "a sociology for women," which has necessarily been transformed into "a sociology for people." It does not identify a position or a category of position, gender, class, or race within the society, but it does establish as a subject position for institutional ethnography as a method of inquiry, a site for the knower that is open to anyone.

As a method of inquiry, institutional ethnography is designed to create an alternate to the objectified subject of knowledge of established social scientific discourse. The latter conforms to and is integrated with what I have come to call the "ruling relations"—that extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually

mediated, that connect us across space and time and organize our everyday lives—the corporations, government bureaucracies, academic and professional discourses, mass media, and the complex of relations that interconnect them. At the inception of this early stage of late-twentieth-century women's movement, women were excluded from appearing as agents or subjects with the ruling relations. However we might have been at work in them, we were subordinates. We were women whose work as mothers reproduced the same gendered organization that subordinated us; we were the support staff, store clerks, nurses, social workers doing casework and not administration, and so on. In the university itself, we were few and mostly marginal (two distinguished women in the department where I first worked in Canada had never had more than annual lectureships).

"Standpoint" as the design of a subject position in institutional ethnography creates a point of entry into discovering the social that does not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society or political economy. It is a method of inquiry that works from the actualities of people's everyday lives and experience to discover the social as it extends beyond experience. A standpoint in people's everyday lives is integral to that method. It is integral to a sociology creating a subject position within its discourse, which anyone can occupy. The institutional ethnographer works from the social in people's experience to discover its presence and organization in their lives and to explicate or map that organization beyond the local of the everyday.

EXAMINING SOCIOLOGY FROM A WOMAN'S STANDPOINT

The project of developing a sociology that does not objectify originated, as did so much in the women's

¹Hartsock's concern is to reframe historical materialism so that women's experience and interests are fully integrated. Of particular importance to her is the adequate recognition of the forms of power that the women's movement has named "patriarchal." Women's marginal position, structured as it is around the work associated with reproduction and the direct production of subsistence, locates women distinctively in the mode of production in general. For her, taking a feminist standpoint introduces a dimension into historical materialism neglected by Marx and his successors. She designs a feminist standpoint that has a specifically political import. It might, I suppose, be criticized as essentialist, but, if we consider not just North America and not just white middle-class professional North America, it's hard to deny that Hartsock is characterizing a reality for women worldwide. In Canada a recent census report shows that while women's participation in the paid labor force has increased substantially over the past thirty years, "women remain more than twice as likely as men to do at least 30 hours a week of cooking and cleaning" (Andersen 2003, A7) and are more involved in child care than men, particularly care of younger children.

movement, in exploring experiences in my life as a woman. That exploration put into question the fundamentals of the sociology I had learned at length and sometimes painfully as an undergraduate and graduate school student. I was, in those early times, a sociologist teaching at the University of British Columbia, on the west coast of Canada, and a single parent with two small boys. My experience was of contradictory modes of working existence: on the one hand was the work of the home and of being a mother; on the other, the work of the academy, preparing for classes, teaching, faculty meetings, writing papers, and so on. I could not see my work at home in relation to the sociology I taught, in part, of course, because that sociology had almost nothing to say about it.

I learned from the women's movement to begin in my own experience and start there in finding the voice that asserted the buried woman. I started to explore what it might mean to think sociologically from the place where I was in-body, living with my children in my home and with those cares and consciousness that are integral to that work. Here were the particularities of my relationships with my children, my neighbors, my friends, their friends, our rabbit (surprisingly fierce and destructive—my copy of George Herbert Mead's *Mind, Self, and Society* bars scores inflicted by our long-eared pet's teeth and claws), our two dogs, and an occasional hamster. In this mode, I was attentive to the varieties of demands that housekeeping, cooking, child care, and the multiple minor tasks of our local settings made on me. When I went to work in the university, I did not, of course, step out of my body, but the focus of my work was not on the local particularities of relationships and setting but on sociological discourse read and taught or on the administrative work of a university department. Body, of course, was there as it had to be to get the work done, but the work was not organized by and in relation to it.

The two subjectivities, home and university, could not be blended. They ran on separate tracks with distinct phenomenal organization. Memory, attention, reasoning, and response were organized quite differently. Remembering a dental appointment for one of the children wasn't part of my academic consciousness, and if I wasn't careful to find some way of reminding myself that didn't depend on memory, I might have well forgot it. My experiences uncovered radical differences between home and academy in how they were situated, and how they situated me, in the society. Home was organized around the particularities of my children's

bodies, faces, movements, the sounds of their voices, the smell of their hair, the arguments, the play, the evening rituals of reading, the stress of getting them off to school in the morning, cooking, and serving meals, and the multitudes of the everyday that cannot be enumerated, an intense, preoccupying world of work that also cannot really be defined. My work at the university was quite differently articulated; the sociology I thought and taught was embedded in the texts that linked me into a discourse extending indefinitely into only very partially known networks of others, some just names of the dead; some the heroes and masters of the contemporary discipline; some just names on books or articles; and others known as teachers, colleagues, and contemporaries in graduate school. The administrative work done by faculty tied into the administration of the university, known at that time only vaguely as powers such as dean or president or as offices such as the registrar, all of whom regulated the work we did with students. My first act on arriving in the department office, after greeting the secretaries, was to open my mail and thus to enter a world of action in texts.

I knew a practice of subjectivity in the university that excluded the local and bodily from its field. Learning from the women's movement to start from where I was as a woman, I began to attend to the university and my work there from the standpoint of "home" subjectivity. I started to notice what I had not seen before. How odd, as I am walking down the central mall of that university that opens up to the dark blue of the humped islands and the further snowy mountains to the north, to see on my left a large hole where before there had been a building! In the mode of the everyday you can find the connections, though you may not always understand them. In a house with children and dogs and rabbits, the connection between the destruction of the spine of my copy of *Mind, Self, and Society* and that rabbit hanging around in my workspace was obvious. But the hole where once there'd been a building couldn't be connected to any obvious agent. The peculiar consciousness I practiced in the university began to emerge for me as a puzzlingly strange form of organization. If I traced the provenance of that hole, I'd be climbing up into an order of relations linking administrative process with whatever construction company was actually responsible for the making of the hole; I'd be climbing into a web of budgets, administrative decisions, provincial and federal government funding, and so on and so on. I'd be climbing into that order of relations that institutional

ethnographers call the “ruling relations.” These could be seen as relations that divorced the subject from the particularized settings and relationships of her life and work as mother and housewife. They created subject positions that elevated consciousness into a universalized mode, whether of the social relations mediated by money or of those organized as objectivity in academic or professional discourse. Practicing

embodiment on the terrain of the disembodied of those relations brought them into view. I became aware of them as I became aware of their presence and power in the everyday, and, going beyond that hole in the ground, I also began to think of the sociology I practiced in the everyday working world of the university as an organization of discursive relations fully integrated with them.



Introduction to *The Everyday World as Problematic*

In this reading taken from *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987), Smith further elucidates institutional ethnography using concrete examples from her own experience. As you will see, by starting from her own experience, Smith does *not* mean that she engages only in a self-indulgent inner exploration with herself as sole focus and object. Rather, Smith means that she begins from her own original but tacit knowledge as well as from the acts by which she brings this knowledge into her grasp (Calhoun 2003:320). As Smith states, “we can never escape the circles of our own heads if we accept that as our territory . . . We aim not at a reiteration of what we already (tacitly) know, but at an exploration of what passes beyond that knowledge and is deeply implicated in how it is” (ibid).

The Everyday World as Problematic (1987)

Dorothy Smith

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: A FEMINIST RESEARCH STRATEGY

Institutional Relations as Generalizers of Actual Local Experience

Let me give an everyday example of what I mean by the “problematic of the everyday world.” When I take my dog for a walk in the morning, I observe a number of what we might call “conventions.” I myself walk on the sidewalk; I do not walk on the neighbors’ lawns. My dog, however, freely runs over the lawns. My dog also, if I am not careful, may shit on a neighbor’s lawn, and there are certainly some neighbors who do not like this. I am, of course, aware of this problem, and I try to arrange for my dog to do his business in places that are appropriate. I am particularly careful to see that he

avoids the well-kept lawns because those are the ones I know I am most likely to be in trouble over should I/he slip up—which does happen occasionally. The neighborhood I live in is a mixture of single-family residences and rental units, and the differences between the well- and ill-kept lawns are related to this. On the whole, those living in rental units do not care so much about the appearance of their front lawn, whereas those who own their own residences are more likely to give care and attention to the grass and sometimes to the flower beds in front of the house.

So as I walk down the street keeping an eye on my dog I am observing some of the niceties of different forms of property ownership. I try to regulate my dog’s behavior with particular scrupulousness in relation to the property rights of the owners of single-family dwellings and am a little more casual where I know the

house consists of rented apartments or bachelor units, or, as in one case, a fraternity house.¹

Customarily in sociology we talk about this behavior in terms of norms. Then we see my selection of a path of behavior for my dog as guided by certain norms held in common by myself and my neighbors. But something important escapes this. The notion of “norm” provides for the surface properties of my behavior, what I can be seen to be doing—in general preventing my dog from shitting on others’ lawns and being particularly careful where negative sanctions are more likely to be incurred. A description of the kind I have given is in this way transposed into a normative statement.

As a norm it is represented as governing the observed behavior. What is missing, however, is an account of the constitutive work that is going on. This account arises from a process of practical reasoning. How I walk my dog attends to and constitutes in an active way different forms of property as a locally realized organization. The normative analysis misses how this local course of action is articulated to social relations. Social relations here mean concerted sequences or courses of social action implicating more than one individual whose participants are not necessarily present or known to one another. There are social relations that are not encompassed by the setting in which my dog is walked, but they nonetheless enter in and organize it. The existence of single-family dwellings, of rental units, and the like has reference to and depends upon the organization of the state at various levels, its local by-laws, zoning laws, and so forth determining the “real estate” character of the neighborhood; it has reference to and depends upon the organization of a real estate market in houses and apartments, and the work of the legal profession and others; it has reference to and organizes the ways in which individual ownership is expressed in local practices that maintain the value of the property both in itself and as part of a respectable neighborhood. Thus this ordinary daily scene, doubtless enacted by many in various forms and settings, has an implicit organization tying each particular local setting to a larger generalized complex of social relations. . . .

The language of the everyday world as it is incorporated into the description of that world is rooted in

social relations beyond it and expresses relations not peculiar to the particular setting it describes. In my account of walking the dog, there are categories anchored in and depending for their meaning on a larger complex of social relations. The meaning of such terms as “single-family residence” and “rental units,” for example, resides in social relations organizing local settings but not fully present in them. The particularizing description gives access to that which is not particular since it is embedded in categories whose meaning reaches into the complex of social relations our inquiry would explicate. Ordinary descriptions, ordinary talk, trail along with them as a property of the meaning of their terms, the extended social relations they name as phenomena.

Thus taking the everyday world as problematic does not confine us to particular descriptions of local settings without possibility of generalization. This has been seen to be the problem with sociological ethnographies, which, however fascinating as accounts of people’s lived worlds, cannot stand as general or typical statements about society and social relations. They have been seen in themselves as only a way station to the development of systematic research procedures that would establish the level of generality or typicality of what has been observed of such-and-such categories of persons. Or they may be read as instances of a general sociological principle. This procedure has been turned on its head in an ingenious fashion in “grounded theory,” which proposes a method of distilling generalizing concepts from the social organization of the local setting observed whereupon the latter becomes an instance of the general principles distilled from it.ⁱⁱ The popularity of this device testifies to the extent to which the problem of generalizability is felt by sociologists. The single case has no significance unless it can in some way or another be extrapolated to some general statement either about society or some subgroup represented methodologically as a population of individuals, or connecting the local and particular with a generalizing concept of sociological discourse.

Beginning with the everyday world as problematic bypasses this issue. The relation of the local and particular to generalized social relations is not a conceptual

ⁱThe more tender and civic-minded of my readers may like to know that two things have changed in my life since I wrote this. One is that I no longer have a dog of my own. I do, however, sometimes dog-sit my two sons’ dogs. The second is that we now have “poop ‘n’ scoop” laws in Toronto, so I have learned to overcome my rural-bred tendencies to let the shit lie where it falls.

ⁱⁱBarney Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1967).

or methodological issue, it is a property of social organization. The particular “case” is not particular in the aspects that are of concern to the inquirer. Indeed, it is not a “case” for it presents itself to us rather as a point of entry, the locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process. The problematic of the everyday world arises precisely at the juncture of particular experience, with generalizing and abstracted forms of social relations organizing a division of labor in society at large. . . .

I am using the terms “institutional” and “institution” to identify a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus, organized around a distinctive function—education, health care, law, and the like. In contrast to such concepts as bureaucracy, “institution” does not identify a determinate form of social organization, but rather the intersection and coordination of more than one relational mode of the ruling apparatus. Characteristically, state agencies are tied in with professional forms of organization, and both are interpenetrated by relations of discourse of more than one order. We might imagine institutions as nodes or knots in the relations of the ruling apparatus to class, coordinating multiple strands of action into a functional complex. Integral to the coordinating process are ideologies systematically developed to provide categories and concepts expressing the relation of local courses of action to the institutional function (a point to be elaborated later), providing a currency or currencies enabling interchange between different specialized parts of the complex and a common conceptual organization coordinating its diverse sites. The notion of ethnography is introduced to commit us to an exploration, description, and analysis of such a complex of relations, not conceived in the abstract but from the entry point of some particular person or persons whose everyday world of working is organized thereby. . . .

Institutional ethnography explores the social relations individuals bring into being in and through their actual practices. Its methods, whether of observation, interviewing, recollection of work experience, use of archives, textual analysis, or other, are constrained by the practicalities of investigation of social relations as actual practices. Note however that the institutional

ethnography as a way of investigating the problematic of the everyday world does not involve substituting the analysis, the perspectives and views of subjects, for the investigation by the sociologist. Though women are indeed the expert practitioners of their everyday worlds, the notion of the everyday world as problematic assumes that disclosure of the extralocal determinations of our experience does not lie within the scope of everyday practices. We can see only so much without specialized investigation, and the latter should be the sociologist’s special business.

Ideology, Institutions, and the Concept of Work as Ethnographic Ground

The coordination of institutional processes is mediated ideologically. The categories and concepts of ideology express the relation of member’s actual practices—their work—to the institutional function. Ethnomethodology has developed the notion of accountability to identify members’ methods accomplishing the orderliness and sense of local processes.ⁱⁱⁱ Members themselves and for themselves constitute the observability and reportability of what has happened or is going on, in how they take it up as a matter for anyone to find and recognize. Members make use of categories and concepts to analyze settings for features thus made observable. The apparently referential operation of locally applied categories and concepts is constitutive of the reference itself.^{iv} When applied to the institutional context, the notion of accountability locates practices tying local settings to the nonlocal organization of the ruling apparatus. Indeed, the institutional process itself can be seen as a dialectic between what members do intending the categories and concepts of institutional ideology and the analytic and descriptive practices of those categories and concepts deployed in accomplishing the observability of what is done, has happened, is going on, and so forth. Thus local practices in their historical particularity and irreversibility are made accountable in terms of categories and concepts expressing the function of the institution. Members’ interpretive practices analyzing the work processes that bring the institutional process into

ⁱⁱⁱHarold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967).

^{iv}D.L. Wieder, *Language and Social Reality: The Case of Telling the Convict Code* (The Hague: Moulton, 1974).

being in actuality constitute those work processes as institutional courses of action.^v

Institutional ideologies are acquired by members as methods of analyzing experiences located in the work process of the institution. Professional training in particular teaches people how to recycle the actualities of their experience into the forms in which it is recognizable within institutional discourse. For example, when teachers are in training they learn a vocabulary and analytic procedures that accomplish the classroom in the institutional mode. They learn to analyze and name the behavior of students as “appropriate” or “inappropriate” and to analyze and name their own (and others’) responses. In responding to “inappropriate” behavior, they have been taught to avoid “undermining the student’s ego” and hence to avoid such practices as “sarcasm.” They should, rather, be “supportive.” This ideological package provides a procedure for subsuming what goes on in the classroom under professional educational discourse, making classroom processes observable-reportable within an institutional order.^{vi} In this way the work and practical reasoning of individuals and the locally accomplished order that is their product become an expression of the non-local relations of the professional and bureaucratic discourse of the ruling apparatus.

The accountability procedures of institutions make some things visible, while others as much a part of the overall work organization that performs the institution

do not come into view at all or as other than themselves. Local practices glossed by the categories of the discourse are provided with boundaries of observability beneath which a subterranean life continues. What is observable does not appear as the work of individuals, and not all the work and practices of individuals become observable. When my son was in elementary school, his homework one day was to write up an experiment he had done in science class that day. He asked me how to do it and I replied (not very helpfully), “Well, just write down everything you did.” He told me not to be so stupid. “Of course,” he said, “they don’t mean you write about *everything*, like about filling the jar with water from the tap and taking it to the bench.” Clearly there were things done around the doing of an experiment that were essential to, but not entered into or made accountable within, the “experimental procedure.” Its boundaries were organized conceptually to select from a locally indivisible work process, some aspects to be taken as part of the experiment and others to be discounted. All were done. All were necessary. But only some were to be made observable-reportable within the textual mode of the teaching of science. In like ways, institutional ideologies analyze local settings, drawing boundaries and the like. They provide analytic procedures for those settings that attend selectively to work processes, thus making only selective aspects of them accountable within the institutional order.

^vDorothy E. Smith, “No one commits suicide: Textual analyses of ideological practices,” *Human Studies* 6 (1983):309–359.

^{vi}See Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*.

PATRICIA HILL COLLINS (1948–): A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ■■

Patricia Hill Collins was born in 1948 and grew up in a working-class family in Philadelphia. She earned her BA from Brandeis University in 1969 and her MAT from Harvard University in 1970. Collins worked as a school teacher and curriculum specialist before returning to graduate school and receiving her PhD in sociology from Brandeis University in 1984. It was in teaching a course called “The Black Woman” to middle-school girls in 1970 that Collins realized not only the dearth of teaching materials by and about black women, but also the *significance* of this dearth. The exclusion of black women from intellectual discourses became the subject of her first book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* ([1990] 2000), which won the Jessie Bernard Award of the American Sociological Association for significant scholarship in gender as well as the C. Wright Mills Award from the Society for the Study of Social Problems. In this highly acclaimed book (excerpts from which you

will read), Collins illuminates the rich, self-defined intellectual tradition of black women, which, she argues, has persisted despite formal discursive exclusion. By positioning itself as documenting a tradition or canon, *Black Feminist Thought* legitimates black women's intellectual production as critical social theory (Collins 1998:8).

Collins further explores black feminist thought in *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (1998) and *Black Sexual Politics* (2004). In *Fighting Words*, Collins shows not only how elite discourses present a view of social reality that elevates the ideas and actions of highly educated white men as normative and superior (ibid.:45), but also how black feminist thought has remained dynamic and oppositional under changing social conditions. In *Black Sexual Politics* (2004), Collins continues to firmly situate black feminist thought in the critical tradition by underscoring that antiracist African American politics in the post-civil rights era must soundly address questions of gender and sexuality.

Collins has taught at a number of universities, including Northern Kentucky University, Tufts University, Boston College, and the University of Cincinnati, where she is Charles Phelps Taft Emeritus Professor of Sociology within the Department of African American Studies. Since 2005, she has also been a professor of sociology at the University of Maryland. Collins's most recent book, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Essays on Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (2006), explores how black nationalism works today in the wake of changing black youth identity.

■ COLLINS'S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES AND CORE IDEAS

Patricia Hill Collins's work integrates elements of feminist theory, standpoint theory, critical theory, Afrocentrism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. Collins was particularly influenced by Dorothy Smith, as is evident in her concept of **standpoint epistemology**, which she defines as the philosophic viewpoint that what one knows is affected by the standpoint (or position) one has in society ("epistemology" means how we know what we know, how we decide what is valid knowledge). Collins extends the critical/phenomenological/feminist ideas of Dorothy Smith by illuminating the particular epistemological standpoint of black women. Yet, Collins does not merely add the empirical dimension of "race" to Smith's feminist, critical/phenomenological framework. Rather, taking a poststructural/postmodern turn, Collins emphasizes the "interlocking" nature of the wide variety of statuses—for example, race, class, gender, nationality, sexual orientation—that make up our standpoint, and, in the spirit of Foucault (see Chapter 15), she stresses that where there are sites of domination, there are also potential sites of resistance.

Specifically, Collins (1998, 2004) explicitly situates her work within the critical tradition (indeed, she conceptualizes standpoint theory and postmodernism as "examples of critical theory" [1998:254], emphasis added).⁸ For Collins (2004:350), what makes critical theory "critical" is its commitment to "justice, for one's own group and/or for that of other groups." Critical social theory illuminates the "bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing groups of people differently placed in specific political, social, and historical contexts characterized by injustice" (ibid.). Yet, Collins rejects "additive" models of oppression that reflect a dichotomous ("top-down") way of thinking about domination rooted specifically in European masculinist thought. Rather than simply elevate one group's suffering over that of another, Collins maps "differences in penalty and privilege that accompany race, class, gender and similar systems of social injustice" (2004:3).

Collins uses the term **matrix of domination** to underscore that one's position in society is made up of multiple contiguous standpoints rather than just one essentialist standpoint. Thus, in contrast to earlier

⁸By following Craig Calhoun (1995) in considering postmodernism and standpoint theory as "examples of critical theory," Collins (1998:254n4) is rejecting the narrower (but perhaps more well known) definition of critical theory as simply the Frankfurt School tradition (see Chapter 10) or the style of theorizing of Jürgen Habermas (see Chapter 16).

critical accounts (e.g., the Frankfurt School—see Chapter 10) that assume that power operates from the top down by forcing and controlling unwilling victims to bend to the will of more powerful superiors, Collins ([1990] 2000:226) asserts that “depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed. . . . Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone’s lives.”⁹

In addition, Collins emphasizes “that people simultaneously experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions.” (Collins [1990] 2000:227). At the level of the individual, she insists on “the power of the self-definition” (Collins 2004:306) and “self-defined standpoint” (1998:47) and that “each individual has a unique personal biography made up of concrete experiences, values, motivations, and emotions,” thereby reasserting both the subjectivity and agency absent in earlier critical models (e.g., the Frankfurt School). For Collins (1998:50), breaking silence represents a moment of insubordination in relations of power—“a direct, blatant insult delivered before an audience.”

The group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender is vital to Collins’s conceptualization of black feminist thought, which like all specialized thought reflects the interests and standpoint of its creators. Collins locates black feminist thought in the unique literary traditions forged by black women such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Alice Walker, as well as in the everyday experience of ordinary black women. In addition, black feminist thought is rooted in black women’s intellectual tradition nurtured by black women’s community. As Collins ([1990] 2000:253) maintains,

When white men control the knowledge validation process, both political criteria (contextual credibility and evaluation of knowledge claims) can work to suppress Black feminist thought. Therefore, Black women are more likely to choose an alternative epistemology for assessing knowledge claims, one using different standards that are consistent with Black women’s criteria for substantiated knowledge and with our criteria for methodology adequacy. . . .

In other words, Collins maintains that the experience of multiple oppressions makes black women particularly skeptical of and vulnerable to dominant paradigms of knowledge and thus more reliant on their own experiential sources of information. Black women “come to voice” and break the silence of oppression by drawing both from their own experience and from the “collective secret knowledge generated by groups on either side of power,” that is, the black community and the black female community in particular (Collins 1998:48–49). Black feminist thought offers individual African American women the conceptual tools to resist oppression. Black women have historically resisted, and continue to resist, oppression at individual, community, and institutional levels. A women’s blues tradition, the voices of contemporary African American women writers and thinkers, and women’s everyday relationships with each other speak to the outpouring of contemporary black feminist thought in history and literature despite exclusion and/or marginalization in the hegemonic framework.¹⁰

⁹In her recent *Black Sexual Politics* (2004:9–10), Collins takes an even more radical postmodern stance. Here she sees the complexity of “mutually constructing,” intertwined dimensions of race, class, gender, and sexuality as so great that she sets her sights not on “untangling the effects” of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and the like, but rather on simply illuminating them. The point of *Black Sexual Politics*, she says, is not “to tell readers what to think,” but rather “it examines what we might think about” (ibid.).

¹⁰For instance, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* epitomizes black feminist thought. Told from the perspective of the 14-year-old Celie, a semiliterate black girl brutalized first by her stepfather and then by her husband, *The Color Purple* supplants the typical patriarchal concerns of the historical novel—“the taking of lands, or the birth, battles, and deaths of Great Men”—with the scene of “one woman asking another for her underwear” (Berlant 2000:4).

By articulating the powerful but hidden dynamics of black feminist thought, Collins highlights the underlying assumed whiteness of both feminism and academia and reminds white women in particular that they are not the only feminists. In addition, however, black feminist thought disrupts the masculinist underpinnings of Afrocentrism. Collins maintains that in the same way that European theorists have historically prioritized class over race or gender, and feminists have prioritized gender over either race or class, Afrocentric scholarship, although formally acknowledging the significance of gender, relegates it secondary to the more-pressing fight against racism.

To be sure, Collins (1998:174) readily appreciates the guiding principles at the heart of Afrocentrism—most important, the emphases on reconstructing black culture, reconstituting black identity, using racial solidarity to build black community, and fostering an ethic of service to black community development. Yet, she is highly critical of the “unexamined yet powerful” gender ideology in black nationalist projects, particularly that of Afrocentrists such as Molefi Kete Asante (1942–) who seek to replace Eurocentric systems of knowledge with African-centered ways of knowing.¹¹

■ COLLINS’S THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

As indicated earlier, the terms “matrix of domination” and “standpoint epistemology” are explicitly devised so as to reflect a multidimensional approach to order; that is, they pointedly work at the level of the social structure or group and the individual. However, above all, in the spirit of the critical tradition, it is to the collective level that Collins’s work is most attuned. For instance, while on one hand Collins’s term “self-defined standpoint” seems to readily reflect agency at the level of the individual, interestingly, Collins (1998:47) maintains that she favors this term over bell hooks’s term “self-reflexive speech” because self-defined standpoint “ties Black women’s speech communities much more closely to institutionalized power relations.” Clearly, that “standpoint” refers to “historically shared *group-based* experiences” and that “groups have a degree of permanence over time such that group realities transcend individual experiences” reflects a prioritization of the collective realm ([1990] 2000:247, emphasis in original). As Collins ([1990] 2000:249) states,

Groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations also share common experiences in such power relations. Shared angles of vision lead those in similar social locations to be predisposed to interpret in comparable fashion.

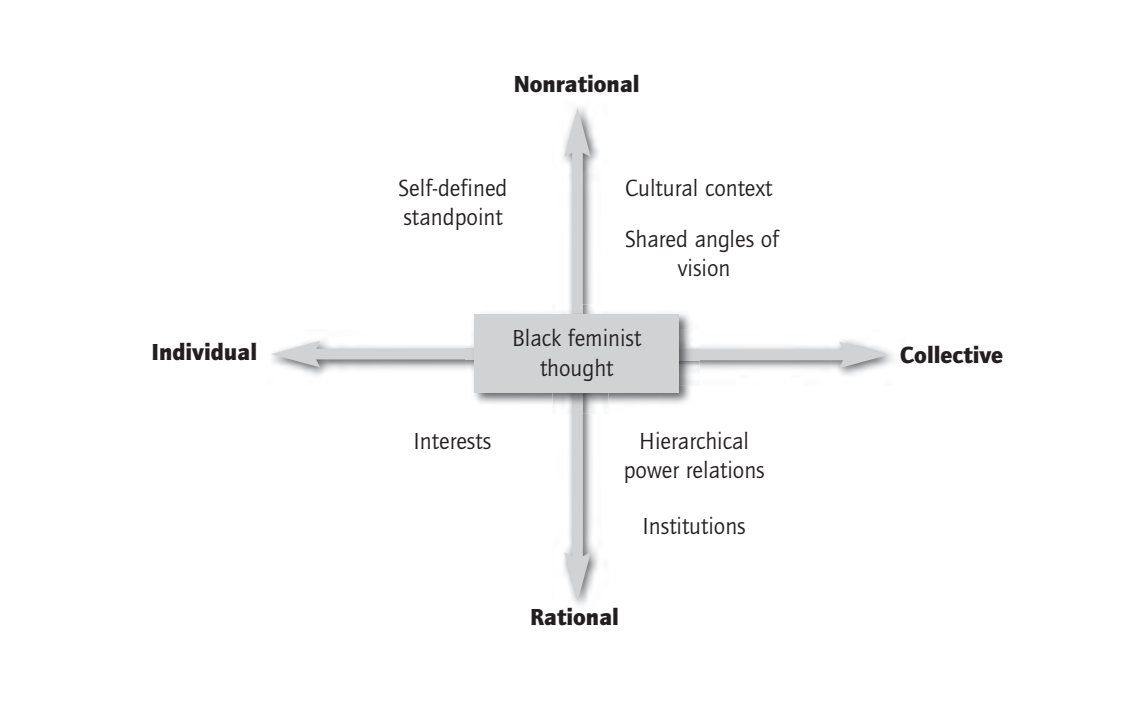
To be sure, Collins readily acknowledges that the individual has “unique” experiences that are rooted in her inimitable social location, which reflects her cognizance of the level of the individual (see Figure 14.3). Here we see that the individual is not a proxy for the group, that in contrast to what Marx supposed, oppressed groups do not possess a fixed or stagnant (or “essential”) identity. As Collins (1998:249) contends, “using the group as the focal point provides space for individual agency.” Nevertheless, Collins never loses sight of the “collective secret knowledge generated by groups on either side of power” from within which individual self-definition ensues (1998:49).

In terms of action, overall Collins’s theory reflects a collective/rationalistic view of power characteristic of critical theory, in that relations of power are perceived as a preexisting hierarchical structure external to the individual. However, at the same time, by emphasizing that these are *relations*

¹¹Asante asserts that Afrocentricity can be done only via complete separation, and that Afrocentrism is vital to combat the Eurocentric arrogance that necessarily obliterates others, for Eurocentrism is nothing less than “symbolic imperialism.” However, Collins identifies several specific ways in which gender assumptions undergird black cultural nationalism.

of power and that this involves both collective, discursive codes and their internalization at the nonrational/individual level, Collins presents a nonrational approach to action as well. Of course, her emphasis on “shared angles of vision” as well as “self-defined standpoint” reflects the collective/nonrational realm and the individual/nonrational realms, respectively. Here we see the significance of “group consciousness, group self-definition and ‘voice’” (ibid.:251), that is, the collective/nonrational realm. Explicitly challenging the materialist, structural Marxist point of view, standpoint theorists such as Collins argue that “ideas matter in systems of power” (ibid.:252). This multidimensional approach is illustrated in Figure 14.3.

Figure 14.3 Collins’s Black Feminist Thought



Reading

Introduction to *Black Feminist Thought*

In the following selection from Collins’s most highly acclaimed book, *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins exposes and discusses the tension for black women as agents of knowledge, acknowledging that “Black culture and many of its traditions oppress women” (p. 230). However, she also warns against portraying black women either “solely as passive, unfortunate recipients of racial and sexual abuses” or “heroic figures who easily engage in resisting oppression” (p. 238). In sum, Collins continually emphasizes the complexity of both systems of domination and resistance.

Black Feminist Thought ([1990] 2000)

Patricia Hill Collins

 DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF
 BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT

Widely used yet increasingly difficult to define, U.S. Black feminist thought encompasses diverse and often contradictory meanings. . . .

Rather than developing definitions and arguing over naming practices—for example, whether this thought should be called Black feminism, womanism, Afrocentric feminism, Africana womanism, and the like—a more useful approach lies in revisiting the reasons why Black feminist thought exists at all. Exploring six distinguishing features that characterize Black feminist thought may provide the common ground that is so sorely needed both among African-American women, and between African-American women and all others whose collective knowledge or thought has a similar purpose. Black feminist thought's distinguishing features need not be unique and may share much with other bodies of knowledge. Rather, it is the *convergence* of these distinguishing features that gives U.S. Black feminist thought its distinctive contours.

Why U.S. Black Feminist Thought?

Black feminism remains important because U.S. Black women constitute an oppressed group. As a collectivity, U.S. Black women participate in a *dialectical* relationship linking African-American women's oppression and activism. Dialectical relationships of this sort mean that two parties are opposed and opposite. As long as Black women's subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation persists, Black feminism as an activist response to that oppression will remain needed.

In a similar fashion, the overarching purpose of U.S. Black feminist thought is also to resist oppression, both its practices and the ideas that justify it. If intersecting oppressions did not exist, Black feminist thought and similar oppositional knowledges would be unnecessary. As a critical social theory, Black feminist thought aims

to empower African-American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. Since Black women cannot be fully empowered unless intersecting oppressions themselves are eliminated, Black feminist thought supports broad principles of social justice that transcend U.S. Black women's particular needs.

Because so much of U.S. Black feminism has been filtered through the prism of the U.S. context, its contours have been greatly affected by the specificity of American multiculturalism (Takaki 1993). In particular, U.S. Black feminist thought and practice respond to a fundamental contradiction of U.S. society. On the one hand, democratic promises of individual freedom, equality under the law, and social justice are made to all American citizens. Yet on the other hand, the reality of differential group treatment based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status persists. Groups organized around race, class, and gender in and of themselves are not inherently a problem. However, when African-Americans, poor people, women, and other groups discriminated against see little hope for group-based advancement, this situation constitutes social injustice.

Within this overarching contradiction, U.S. Black women encounter a distinctive set of social practices that accompany our particular history within a unique matrix of domination characterized by intersecting oppressions. Race is far from being the only significant marker of group difference—class, gender, sexuality, religion, and citizenship status all matter greatly in the United States (Andersen and Collins 1998). Yet for African-American women, the effects of institutionalized racism remain visible and palpable. Moreover, the institutionalized racism that African-American women encounter relies heavily on racial segregation and accompanying discriminatory practices designed to deny U.S. Blacks equitable treatment. Despite important strides to desegregate U.S. society since 1970, racial segregation remains deeply entrenched in housing, schooling, and employment (Massey and Denton 1993). For many African-American

women, racism is not something that exists in the distance. We encounter racism in everyday situations in workplaces, stores, schools, housing, and daily social interaction (St. Jean and Feagin 1998). Most Black women do not have the opportunity to befriend White women and men as neighbors, nor do their children attend school with White children. Racial segregation remains a fundamental feature of the U.S. social landscape, leaving many African-Americans with the belief that “the more things change, the more they stay the same” (Collins 1998a, 11–43). Overlaying these persisting inequalities is a rhetoric of color blindness designed to render these social inequalities invisible. In a context where many believe that to talk of race fosters racism, equality allegedly lies in treating everyone the same. Yet as Kimberle Crenshaw (1997) points out, “it is fairly obvious that treating different things the same can generate as much inequality as treating the same things differently” (p. 285).

Although racial segregation is now organized differently than in prior eras (Collins 1998a, 11–43), being Black and female in the United States continues to expose African-American women to certain common experiences. U.S. Black women’s similar work and family experiences as well as our participation in diverse expressions of African-American culture mean that, overall, U.S. Black women as a group live in a different world from that of people who are not Black and female. For individual women, the particular experiences that accrue to living as a Black woman in the United States can stimulate a distinctive consciousness concerning our own experiences and society overall. Many African-American women grasp this connection between what one does and how one thinks. Hannah Nelson, an elderly Black domestic worker, discusses how work shapes the perspectives of African-American and White women: “Since I have to work, I don’t really have to worry about most of the things that most of the white women I have worked for are worrying about. And if these women did their own work, they would think just like I do—about this, anyway” (Gwaltney 1980, 4). Ruth Shays, a Black inner-city resident, points out how variations in men’s and women’s experiences lead to differences in perspective. “The mind of the man and the mind of the woman is the same” she notes, “but this business of living makes women use their minds in ways that men don’t even have to think about” (Gwaltney 1980, 33).

A recognition of this connection between experience and consciousness that shapes the everyday lives of

individual African-American women often pervades the works of Black women activists and scholars. In her autobiography, Ida B. Wells-Barnett describes how the lynching of her friends had such an impact on her worldview that she subsequently devoted much of her life to the anti-lynching cause (Duster 1970). Sociologist Joyce Ladner’s discomfort with the disparity between the teachings of mainstream scholarship and her experiences as a young Black woman in the South led her to write *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow* (1972), a groundbreaking study of Black female adolescence. Similarly, the transformed consciousness experienced by Janie, the light-skinned heroine of Zora Neale Hurston’s (1937) classic *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, from obedient granddaughter and wife to a self-defined African-American woman, can be directly traced to her experiences with each of her three husbands. In one scene Janie’s second husband, angry because she served him a dinner of scorched rice, underdone fish, and soggy bread, hits her. That incident stimulates Janie to stand “where he left her for unmeasured time” and think. And in her thinking “her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered. . . . [S]he had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them” (p. 63).

Overall, these ties between what one does and what one thinks illustrated by *individual* Black women can also characterize Black women’s experiences and ideas as a *group*. Historically, racial segregation in housing, education, and employment fostered group commonalities that encouraged the formation of a group-based, collective standpoint. For example, the heavy concentration of U.S. Black women in domestic work coupled with racial segregation in housing and schools meant that U.S. Black women had common organizational networks that enabled them to share experiences and construct a collective body of wisdom. This collective wisdom on how to survive as U.S. Black women constituted a distinctive Black women’s standpoint on gender-specific patterns of racial segregation and its accompanying economic penalties.

The presence of Black women’s collective wisdom challenges two prevailing interpretations of the consciousness of oppressed groups. One approach claims that subordinate groups identify with the powerful and have no valid independent interpretation of their own oppression. The second assumes the oppressed are less human than their rulers, and are therefore less capable of interpreting their own experiences (Rollins 1985; Scott 1985). Both approaches see any independent consciousness expressed by African-American women and

other oppressed groups as being either not of our own making or inferior to that of dominant groups. More importantly, both explanations suggest that the alleged lack of political activism on the part of oppressed groups stems from our flawed consciousness of our own subordination.

Historically, Black women's group location in intersecting oppressions produced commonalities among individual African-American women. At the same time, while common experiences may predispose Black women to develop a distinctive group consciousness, they guarantee neither that such a consciousness will develop among all women nor that it will be articulated as such by the group. As historical conditions change, so do the links among the types of experiences Black women will have and any ensuing group consciousness concerning those experiences. Because group standpoints are situated in, reflect, and help shape unjust power relations, standpoints are not static (Collins 1998a, 201–28). Thus, common challenges may foster similar angles of vision leading to a group knowledge or standpoint among African-American women. Or they may not.

Diverse Responses to Common Challenges Within Black Feminism

A second distinguishing feature of U.S. Black feminist thought emerges from a tension linking experiences and ideas. On the one hand, all African-American women face similar challenges that result from living in a society that historically and routinely derogates women of African descent. Despite the fact that U.S. Black women face common challenges, this neither means that individual African-American women have all had the same experiences nor that we agree on the significance of our varying experiences. Thus, on the other hand, despite the common challenges confronting U.S. Black women as a group, diverse responses to these core themes characterize U.S. Black women's group knowledge or standpoint.

Despite differences of age, sexual orientation, social class, region, and religion, U.S. Black women encounter societal practices that restrict us to inferior housing, neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and public treatment and hide this differential consideration behind an array of common beliefs about Black women's intelligence, work habits, and sexuality. These common challenges in turn result in recurring patterns of experiences for individual group members. For example, African-American women

from quite diverse backgrounds report similar treatment in stores. Not every *individual* Black woman consumer need experience being followed in a store as a potential shoplifter, ignored while others are waited on first, or seated near restaurant kitchens and rest rooms, for African-American women as a collectivity to recognize that differential *group* treatment is operating.

Since standpoints refer to group knowledge, recurring patterns of differential treatment such as these suggest that certain themes will characterize U.S. Black women's group knowledge or standpoint. For example, one core theme concerns multifaceted legacies of struggle, especially in response to forms of violence that accompany intersecting oppressions (Collins 1998d). Katie Cannon observes, "[T]hroughout the history of the United States, the interrelationship of white supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black woman's reality as a situation of struggle—a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black, exploited, and oppressed" (1985, 30). Black women's vulnerability to assaults in the workplace, on the street, at home, and in media representations has been one factor fostering this legacy of struggle.

Despite differences created by historical era, age, social class, sexual orientation, skin color, or ethnicity, the legacy of struggle against the violence that permeates U.S. social structures is a common thread binding African-American women. Anna Julia Cooper, an educated, nineteenth-century Black woman intellectual, describes Black women's vulnerability to sexual violence:

I would beg . . . to add my plea for the *Colored Girls* of the South:—that large, bright, promising fatally beautiful class . . . so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction; often without a father to whom they dare apply the loving term, often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honor with his life's blood; in the midst of pitfalls and snares, waylaid by the lower classes of white men, with no shelter, no protection. (Cooper 1892, 240)

Yet during this period Cooper and other middle-class U.S. Black women built a powerful club movement and numerous community organizations (Giddings 1984, 1988; Gilkes 1985).

Stating that a legacy of struggle exists does not mean that all U.S. Black women share its benefits or even

recognize it. For example, for African-American girls, age often offers little protection from assaults. Far too many young Black girls inhabit hazardous and hostile environments (Carroll 1997). In 1975 I received an essay titled “My World” from Sandra, a sixth-grade student who was a resident of one of the most dangerous public housing projects in Boston. Sandra wrote, “My world is full of people getting rape. People shooting on another. Kids and grownups fighting over girlfriends. And people without jobs who can’t afford to get a education so they can get a job . . . winos on the streets raping and killing little girls.” Her words poignantly express a growing Black feminist sensibility that she may be victimized by racism, misogyny, and poverty. They reveal her awareness that she is vulnerable to rape as a form of sexual violence. Despite her feelings about her neighborhood, Sandra not only walked the streets daily but managed safely to deliver three siblings to school. In doing so she participated in a Black women’s legacy of struggle. Sandra prevailed, but at a cost. Unlike Sandra, others simply quit.

This legacy of struggle constitutes one of several core themes of a Black women’s standpoint. Efforts to reclaim U.S. Black women’s intellectual traditions have revealed Black women’s long-standing attention to additional core themes first recorded by Maria W. Stewart (Richardson 1987). Stewart’s perspective on intersecting oppressions, her call for replacing derogated images of Black womanhood with self-defined images, her belief in Black women’s activism as mothers, teachers, and Black community leaders, and her sensitivity to sexual politics are all core themes advanced by a variety of Black feminist intellectuals.

Despite the common challenges confronting African-American women as a group, individual Black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion. The existence of core themes does not mean that African-American women respond to these themes in the same way. Differences among individual Black women produce different patterns of experiential knowledge that in turn shape individual reactions to the core themes. For example, when faced with controlling images of Black women as being ugly and unfeminine, some women—such as Sojourner Truth—demand, “Ain’t I a woman?” By deconstructing the conceptual apparatus of the dominant group, they challenge notions of Barbie-doll femininity premised on middle-class White women’s experiences (duCille 1996, 8–59). In contrast, other women internalize the controlling images and come to believe that they are the

stereotypes (Brown-Collins and Sussewell 1986). Still others aim to transgress the boundaries that frame the images themselves. Jaminica, a 14-year-old Black girl, describes her strategies: “Unless you want to get into a big activist battle, you accept the stereotypes given to you and just try and reshape them along the way. So in a way, this gives me a lot of freedom. I can’t be looked at any worse in society than I already am—black and female is pretty high on the list of things not to be” (Carroll 1997, 94–95).

Many factors explain these diverse responses. For example, although all African-American women encounter institutionalized racism, social class differences among African American women influence patterns of racism in housing, education, and employment. Middle-class Blacks are more likely to encounter a pernicious form of racism that has left many angry and disappointed (Cose 1993; Feagin and Sikes 1994). A young manager who graduated with honors from the University of Maryland describes the specific form racism can take for middle-class Blacks. Before she flew to Cleveland to explain a marketing plan for her company, her manager made her go over it three or four times in front of him so that she would not forget *her* marketing plan. Then he explained how to check luggage at an airport and how to reclaim it. “I just sat at lunch listening to this man talking to me like I was a monkey who could remember but couldn’t think,” she recalled. When she had had enough, “I asked him if he wanted to tie my money up in a handkerchief and put a note on me saying that I was an employee of this company. In case I got lost I would be picked up by Traveler’s Aid, and Traveler’s Aid would send me back” (Davis and Watson 1985, 86). Most middle-class Black women do not encounter such blatant incidents, but many working-class Blacks do. Historically, working-class Blacks have struggled with forms of institutionalized racism directly organized by White institutions and by forms mediated by some segments of the Black middle class. Thus, while it shares much with middle-class Black women, the legacy of struggle by working-class Blacks (Kelley 1994) and by working-class Black women in particular will express a distinctive character (Fordham 1993).

Sexuality signals another important factor that influences African-American women’s varying responses to common challenges. Black lesbians have identified heterosexism as a form of oppression and the issues they face living in homophobic communities as shaping their interpretations of everyday events (Shockley

1974; Lorde 1982, 1984; Clarke et al. 1983; Barbara Smith 1983, 1998; Williams 1997). Beverly Smith describes how being a lesbian affected her perceptions of the wedding of one of her closest friends: "God, I wish I had one friend here. Someone who knew me and would understand how I feel. I am masquerading as a nice, straight, middle-class Black 'girl'" (1983, 172). While the majority of those attending the wedding saw only a festive event, Beverly Smith felt that her friend was being sent into a form of bondage. In a similar fashion, varying ethnic and citizenship statuses within the U.S. nation-state as well also shape differences among Black women in the United States. For example, Black Puerto Ricans constitute a group that combines categories of race, nationality, and ethnicity in distinctive ways. Black Puerto Rican women thus must negotiate a distinctive set of experiences that accrue to being racially Black, holding a special form of American citizenship, and being ethnically Latino.

Given how these factors influence diverse response to common challenges, it is important to stress that no homogeneous Black *woman's* standpoint exists. There is no essential or archetypal Black woman whose experiences stand as normal, normative, and thereby authentic. An essentialist understanding of a Black woman's standpoint suppresses differences among Black women in search of an elusive group unity. Instead, it may be more accurate to say that a Black *women's* collective standpoint does exist, one characterized by the tensions that accrue to different responses to common challenges. Because it both recognizes and aims to incorporate heterogeneity in crafting Black women's oppositional knowledge, this Black *women's* standpoint eschews essentialism in favor of democracy. Since Black feminist thought both arises within and aims to articulate a Black *women's* group standpoint regarding experiences associated with intersecting oppressions, stressing this group standpoint's heterogeneous composition is significant.

Moreover in thinking through the contours of a Black woman's standpoint it is equally important to recognize that U.S. Black women also encounter the same challenges (and correspondingly different expressions) as women of African descent within a Black diasporic context. This context in turn is situated within a transnational, global context. The term *diaspora* describes the experiences of people who, through slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and migration, have been forced to leave their native lands (Funani 1998, 417). For U.S. Black women and other people of African descent, a diasporic framework suggests a dispersal from Africa to societies in the Caribbean, South America, North America, and Europe.

Understandings of African-American womanhood thus reflect a distinctive pattern of dispersal associated with forced immigration to the United States and subsequent enslavement (Pala 1995). Since a diasporic framework is not normative, it should not be used to assess the authenticity of people of African descent in reference to an assumed African norm. Rather, Black diasporic frameworks center analyses of Black women within the context of common challenges experienced transnationally.

The version of Black feminism that U.S. Black women have developed certainly must be understood in the context of U.S. nation-state politics. At the same time, U.S. Black feminism as a social justice project shares much with comparable social justice projects advanced not only by other U.S. racial/ethnic groups (see, e.g., Takaki 1993), but by women of African descent across quite diverse societies. In the context of an "intercontinental Black women's consciousness movement" (McLaughlin 1995, 73), women of African descent are dispersed globally, yet the issues we face may be similar. Transnationally, women encounter recurring social issues such as poverty, violence, reproductive concerns, lack of education, sex work, and susceptibility to disease (*Rights of Women* 1998). Placing African-American women's experiences, thought, and practice in a transnational, Black diasporic context reveals these and other commonalities of women of African descent while specifying what is particular to African-American women.

Black Feminist Practice and Black Feminist Thought

A third distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought concerns the connections between U.S. Black women's experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint. . . .

As members of an oppressed group, U.S. Black women have generated alternative practices and knowledges that have been designed to foster U.S. Black women's group empowerment. In contrast to the dialectical relationship linking oppression and activism, a *dialogical* relationship characterizes Black women's collective experiences and group knowledge. On both the individual and the group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness. For U.S. Black women as a collectivity, the struggle for a self-defined Black feminism occurs through an ongoing dialogue whereby action and thought inform one another.

U.S. Black feminism itself illustrates this dialogical relationship. On the one hand, there is U.S. Black feminist practice that emerges in the context of lived experience. When organized and visible, such practice has taken the form of overtly Black feminist social movements dedicated to the empowerment of U.S. Black women. Two especially prominent moments characterize Black feminism's visibility. Providing many of the guiding ideas for today, the first occurred at the turn of the century via the Black women's club movement. The second or modern Black feminist movement was stimulated by the antiracist and women's social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s and continues to the present. However, these periods of overt political activism where African-American women lobbied in our own behalf remain unusual. They appear to be unusual when juxtaposed to more typical patterns of quiescence regarding Black women's advocacy.

Given the history of U.S. racial segregation, Black feminist activism demonstrates distinctive patterns. Because African-Americans have long been relegated to racially segregated environments, U.S. Black feminist practice has often occurred within a context of Black community development efforts and other Black nationalist-inspired projects. Black nationalism emerges in conjunction with racial segregation—U.S. Blacks living in a racially integrated society would most likely see less need for Black nationalism. As a political philosophy, Black nationalism is based on the belief that Black people constitute a people or "nation" with a common history and destiny. Black solidarity, the belief that Blacks have common interests and should support one another, has long permeated Black women's political philosophy. Thus, Black women's path to a "feminist" consciousness often occurs within the context of antiracist social justice projects, many of them influenced by Black nationalist ideologies. In describing how this phenomenon affects Black women in global context, Andree Nicola McLaughlin contends, "[A]mong activist Black women, it is generally recognized that nationalist struggle provides a rich arena for developing a woman's consciousness" (McLaughlin 1995, 80). To look for Black feminism by searching for U.S. Black women who self-identify as "Black feminists" misses the complexity of how Black feminist practice actually operates (Collins 1993a). . . .

As critical social theory, Black feminist thought encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing U.S. Black women as a group. Such theory recognizes that U.S. Black women constitute one group among many that are differently placed within situations of injustice. What makes critical social theory "critical" is its commitment to justice, for one's own group and for other groups.

Within these parameters, knowledge for knowledge's sake is not enough—Black feminist thought must both be tied to Black women's lived experiences and aim to better those experiences in some fashion. When such thought is sufficiently grounded in Black feminist practice, it reflects this dialogical relationship. Black feminist thought encompasses general knowledge that helps U.S. Black women survive in, cope with, and resist our differential treatment. It also includes more specialized knowledge that investigates the specific themes and challenges of any given period of time. Conversely, when U.S. Black women cannot see the connections among themes that permeate Black feminist thought and those that influence Black women's everyday lives, it is appropriate to question the strength of this dialogical relationship. Moreover, it is also reasonable to question the validity of that particular expression of Black feminist thought. For example, during slavery, a special theme within Black feminist thought was how the institutionalized rape of enslaved Black women operated as a mechanism of social control. During the period when Black women worked primarily in agriculture and service, countering the sexual harassment of live-in domestic workers gained special importance. Clear connections could be drawn between the content and purpose of Black feminist thought and important issues in Black women's lives.

The potential significance of Black feminist thought goes far beyond demonstrating that African-American women can be theorists. Like Black feminist practice, which it reflects and which it seeks to foster, Black feminist thought can create collective identity among African-American women about the dimensions of a Black women's standpoint. Through the process of *rearticulation*, Black feminist thought can offer African-American women a different view of ourselves and our worlds (Omi and Winant 1994, 99). By taking the core themes of a Black women's standpoint and infusing them with new meaning, Black feminist thought can stimulate a new consciousness that utilizes Black women's everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge. Rather than raising consciousness, Black feminist thought affirms, rearticulates, and provides a vehicle for expressing in public a consciousness that quite often already exists. More important, this rearticulated consciousness aims to empower African-American women and stimulate resistance. . . .

Dialogical Practices and Black Women Intellectuals

A fourth distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought concerns the essential contributions of African-American

women intellectuals. The existence of a Black women's standpoint does not mean that African-American women, academic or otherwise, appreciate its content, see its significance, or recognize its potential as a catalyst for social change. One key task for Black women intellectuals of diverse ages, social classes, educational backgrounds, and occupations consists of asking the right questions and investigating all dimensions of a Black women's standpoint with and for African-American women. Historically, Black women intellectuals stood in a special relationship to the larger community of African-American women, a relationship that framed Black feminist thought's contours as critical social theory. . . .

This special relationship of Black women intellectuals to the community of African-American women parallels the existence of two interrelated levels of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The commonplace, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African-American women growing from our everyday thoughts and actions constitutes a first and most fundamental level of knowledge. The ideas that Black women share with one another on an informal, daily basis about topics such as how to style our hair, characteristics of "good" Black men, strategies for dealing with White folks, and skills of how to "get over" provide the foundations for this taken-for-granted knowledge.

Experts or specialists who participate in and emerge from a group produce a second, more specialized type of knowledge. Whether working-class or middle-class, educated or not, famous or everyday, the range of Black women intellectuals discussed in Chapter 1 are examples of these specialists. Their theories that facilitate the expression of a Black women's standpoint form the specialized knowledge of Black feminist thought. The two types of knowledge are interdependent. While Black feminist thought articulates the often taken-for-granted knowledge shared by African-American women as a group, the consciousness of Black women may be transformed by such thought. Many Black women blues singers have long sung about taken-for-granted situations that affect U.S. Black women. Through their music, they not only depict Black women's realities, they aim to shape them.

Because they have had greater opportunities to achieve literacy, middle-class Black women have also had greater access to the resources to engage in Black feminist scholarship. Education need not mean alienation from this dialogical relationship. The actions of educated Black women within the Black women's club movement typify this special relationship between one

segment of Black women intellectuals and the wider community of African-American women:

It is important to recognize that black women like Frances Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells were not isolated figures of intellectual genius; they were shaped by and helped to shape a wider movement of Afro-American women. This is not to claim that they were representative of all black women; they and their counterparts formed an educated, intellectual elite, but an elite that tried to develop a cultural and historical perspective that was organic to the wider condition of black womanhood. (Carby 1987, 115)

The work of these women is important because it illustrates a tradition of joining scholarship and activism. Because they often lived in the same neighborhoods as working-class Blacks, turn-of-the-century club women lived in a Black civil society where this dialogical relationship was easier to establish. They saw the problems. They participated in social institutions that encouraged solutions. They fostered the development of a "cultural and historical perspective that was organic to the wider condition of black womanhood." Contemporary Black women intellectuals face similar challenges of fostering dialogues, but do so under greatly changed social conditions. Whereas racial segregation was designed to keep U.S. Blacks oppressed, it fostered a form of racial solidarity that flourished in all-Black neighborhoods. In contrast, now that Blacks live in economically heterogeneous neighborhoods, achieving the same racial solidarity raises new challenges. . . .

Black Feminism as Dynamic and Changing

A fifth distinguishing feature of U.S. Black feminist thought concerns the significance of change. In order for Black feminist thought to operate effectively within Black feminism as a social justice project, both must remain dynamic. Neither Black feminist thought as a critical social theory nor Black feminist practice can be static; as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them. For example, stressing the importance of Black women's centrality to Black feminist thought does not mean that all African-American women desire, are positioned, or are qualified to exert this type of intellectual leadership. Under current conditions, some Black women thinkers have lost contact with Black feminist practice. Conversely, the changed social conditions under which U.S. Black women now come to womanhood—class-segregated

neighborhoods, some integrated, far more not—place Black women of different social classes in entirely new relationships with one another. . . .

The changing social conditions that confront African-American women stimulate the need for new Black feminist analyses of the common differences that characterize U.S. Black womanhood. Some Black women thinkers are already engaged in this process. Take, for example, Barbara Omolade's (1994) insightful analysis of Black women's historical and contemporary participation in mammy work. Most can understand mammy work's historical context, one where Black women were confined to domestic service, with Aunt Jemima created as a controlling image designed to hide Black women's exploitation. Understanding the limitations of domestic service, much of Black women's progress in the labor market has been measured by the move out of domestic service. Currently, few U.S. Black women work in domestic service in private homes. Instead, a good deal of this work in private homes is now done by undocumented immigrant women of color who lack U.S. citizenship; their exploitation resembles that long visited upon African-American women (Chang 1994). But, as Omolade points out, these changes do not mean that U.S. Black women have escaped mammy work. Even though few Aunt Jemimas exist today, and those that do have been cosmetically altered, leading to the impression that mammy work has disappeared, Omolade reminds us that mammy work has assumed new forms. Within each segment of the labor market—the low-paid jobs at fast-food establishments, nursing homes, day-care centers, and dry cleaners that characterize the secondary sector, the secretaries and clerical workers of the primary lower tier sector, or the teachers, social workers, nurses, and administrators of the primary upper tier sector—U.S. Black women still do a remarkable share of the emotional nurturing and cleaning up after other people, often for lower pay. In this context the task for contemporary Black feminist thought lies in explicating these changing relationships and developing analyses of how these commonalities are experienced differently.

The changing conditions of Black women's work overall has important implications for Black women's intellectual work. Historically, the suppression of Black feminist thought has meant that Black women intellectuals have traditionally relied on alternative institutional locations to produce specialized knowledge about a Black women's standpoint. Many Black women scholars, writers, and artists have worked either alone, as was the case with Maria W. Stewart, or within African-American community organizations, the case for Black women in the club movement and in Black churches. The grudging

incorporation of work on Black women into curricular offerings of historically White colleges and universities, coupled with the creation of a critical mass of African-American women writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor within these institutional locations, means that Black women intellectuals can now find employment within academia. Black women's history and Black feminist literary criticism constitute two focal points of this renaissance in Black women's intellectual work (Carby 1987). Moreover, U.S. Black women's access to the media remains unprecedented, as talk show hostess Oprah Winfrey's long-running television show and forays into film production suggest.

The visibility provided U.S. Black women and our ideas via these new institutional locations has been immense. However, one danger facing African-American women intellectuals working in these new locations concerns the potential isolation of individual thinkers from Black women's collective experiences—lack of access to other U.S. Black women and to Black women's communities. Another is the pressure to separate thought from action—particularly political activism—that typically accompanies training in standard academic disciplines or participating in allegedly neutral spheres like the “free” press. Yet another involves the inability of some Black women “superstars” to critique the terms of their own participation in these new relations. Blinded by their self-proclaimed Black feminist diva aspirations, they feel that they owe no one, especially other Black women. Instead, they become trapped within their own impoverished Black feminist universes. Despite these dangers, these new institutional locations provide a multitude of opportunities for enhancing Black feminist thought's visibility. In this new context, the challenge lies in remaining dynamic, all the while keeping in mind that a moving target is more difficult to hit.

U.S. Black Feminism and Other Social Justice Projects

A final distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought concerns its relationship to other projects for social justice. A broad range of African-American women intellectuals have advanced the view that Black women's struggles are part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice. In an 1893 speech to women, Anna Julia Cooper cogently expressed this worldview:

We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or

condition. . . . The colored woman feels that woman's cause is one and universal; and that . . . not till race, color, sex, and condition are seen as accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won—not the white woman's nor the black woman's, not the red woman's but the cause of every man and of every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong. (Loewenberg and Bogin 1976, 330–31)

Like Cooper, many African-American women intellectuals embrace this perspective regardless of particular political solutions we propose, our educational backgrounds, our fields of study, or our historical

periods. Whether we advocate working through autonomous Black women's organizations, becoming part of women's organizations, running for political office, or supporting Black community institutions, African-American women intellectuals repeatedly identify political actions such as these as a *means* for human empowerment rather than ends in and of themselves. Thus one important guiding principle of Black feminism is a recurring humanist vision (Steady 1981, 1987). . . .

Perhaps the most succinct version of the humanist vision in U.S. Black feminist thought is offered by Fannie Lou Hamer, the daughter of sharecroppers and a Mississippi civil rights activist. While sitting on her porch, Ms. Hamer observed, "Ain' no such thing as I can hate anybody and hope to see God's face" (Jordan 1981, xi).



Significant Others

Nancy Chodorow (1944–): Turning Freud on His Head

Arguably the most important psychoanalytic feminist and reinterpreter of Freud, Nancy Chodorow (1944–) is a practicing clinical psychoanalyst and psychotherapist as well as a sociologist. Although she accepts the basic Freudian idea that unconscious and innate erotic and aggressive drives exist, Chodorow is intensely critical of Freud's phallogocentric approach. In contrast to Freud, Chodorow situates innate erotic drives in the context of interpersonal relations, focusing not so much on sexuality per se as on intimacy and separation, primarily in the family and especially between mother and child.

Specifically, in her award-winning book, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Chodorow turns Freud on his head. Chodorow maintains that because of the allocation of work roles, infants usually originally identify with the female parent. That is, the infant first develops a sense of his or her own selfhood in a close, one-on-one relationship with the mother, and qualities possessed by the mother are internalized by the infant to form the beginnings of the child's personality. The particularly strong bonds formed with the mother and the relative absence of the father has important implications for the development of "normal" adult heterosexual identity. Boys achieve their adult sexual identity (i.e., become "men") only by separating themselves from their mothers. This separation entails denying the world of emotional intimacy that she represents. That is, boys become men by defining themselves in opposition to the femininity of their mother. According to Chodorow, the consequence of this is that men have difficulty in dealing with emotional matters: They see acknowledgment of emotions as a sign of vulnerability and weakness. Moreover, social contempt for women (and, in its extreme form, misogyny) arises as boys deny their earliest emotional experiences with their mother and particularly the sexually charged nature of their oedipal love for their mothers. The acknowledgment of emotions, in particular feelings of vulnerability, is considered "feminizing" and is threatening to their status as "real" men (Alsop, Fitzsimons, and Lennon 2002:59).

Girls, on the other hand, are never required to make a complete break with their mothers in order to achieve their adult sexual identity (become “women”). Rather, society fosters the continuation of intense mother-daughter bonds into adulthood. However, not having been forced to emotionally separate from their mothers, women continue to long for the emotional intimacy provided by close relationships. This unconscious desire to form attachments to others leads women to suffer greater dependency needs, as their self-identity is tied to their relationships with others. According to Chodorow, this lack of differentiation explains why women become preoccupied with the very relational issues at the heart of motherhood: intimacy and a lack of ego separation. Women find their self-in-relation (in intimate relations with others), but because of their socialization into adult heterosexuality men lack the emotional capabilities that women need in order to be fulfilled in relationships. Because masculinity is defined by separation and distance, women turn not to men but to motherhood to fulfill their unconscious desire for intimacy; they re-create the early infant–mother relationship by becoming mothers themselves. Of course, as women again mother (and fathers continue to eschew intimacy), the cycle continues on in another generation: a female self that is fundamentally a self-in-relation and a male self that is fundamentally a self in denial of relations (Gerhenson and Williams 2001:282).

Since 1986, Chodorow has been a professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. Her more recent books include *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (1989), *Femininities Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond* (1994), and *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender and Culture* (1999).

RAEWYN CONNELL (1944–): A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ■

Raewyn Connell (formerly R.W. or Bob Connell) is one of Australia’s most highly acclaimed sociologists. She has authored or coauthored a number of books, including *Ruling Class Ruling Culture* (1977), *Class Structure in Australian History* (1980), *Making the Difference* (1982), *Gender and Power* (1987), and *Masculinities* (1995), which has been translated into 13 languages and is among the most-cited research publication in the field. Raewyn’s most recent book, *Southern Theory* (2007) discusses theorists unfamiliar in the European canon of social science, and explores the possibility of a genuinely global social science. Her ongoing work explores the relation between masculinities and neoliberal globalization, combining, in characteristic form, her concern for large-scale social structures with recognition of personal experience and collective agency.

Connell received her doctorate in sociology from the University of Sydney, where she currently holds a University Chair. She has also taught at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Macquarie University in Sydney, Flinders University in Adelaide, and held visiting posts at the University of Toronto, Harvard University, and Ruhr-Universität Bochum. Connell’s work is widely cited in social science and humanities publications internationally. Four of her books were listed among the 10 most influential books in Australian sociology. She is frequently invited to give keynote addresses at conferences and seminars, including events in Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Senegal, and Britain. Connell has received the American Sociological Association’s award for distinguished contribution to the study of sex and gender, as well as the Australian Sociological Association’s award for distinguished service to sociology.

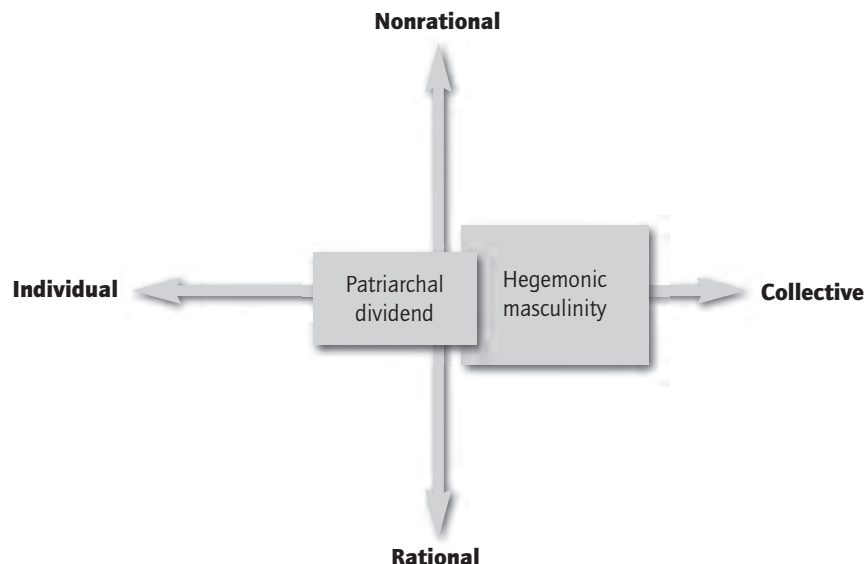
CONNELL’S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES AND CORE IDEAS ■

Akin to Chodorow (see Significant Others Box), Connell is concerned about the resiliency of gender roles and the pattern of practices that allows men’s dominance over women. However, rather than use object relations theory to explain these practices, Connell expands on the work of the Italian journalist, communist and political activist, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), who coined the concept of cultural hegemony (See Significant Others Box, Chapter 2, p. 30). Building on Marx’s notion that “the ruling

ideas are the ideas of the ruling class,” and fascinated by the extraordinary ideological power of the Catholic Church in Italy, Gramsci used the term “cultural hegemony” to refer to how the ruling class maintains its dominance not primarily through force or coercion, but through the willing, “spontaneous” consent of the ruled. In a similar vein, Connell uses the term **hegemonic masculinity** to refer to the pattern of practices that allows men’s dominance over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832). Connell maintains that there are many kinds of masculinities but always there is one which is hegemonic to the rest and marginalize others in a gender system. This does not mean that hegemonic masculinity is either monolithic or static, but rather, that it is the kind of masculinity which is in a superior level. No matter what, each culture will prefer one kind of masculinity over others. Significantly, however, Connell maintains that most men do *not* live in the model of hegemonic masculinity and that masculinity (as femininity) has internal contradictions and historical ruptures, because what is hegemonic is determined in a mobile relation. Above all, Connell is concerned with the changing patterns of “hegemony,” that is to say that the dominance of particular patterns of masculinity over others.

Connell’s conceptualization of **hegemonic masculinity** has the central advantage of locating male dominance not solely to the microlevel and the inter-personal dynamics of the family, but to the macro-level and the public sphere. **Hegemonic masculinity** recognizes not only the gendered character or bureaucracies and workplaces as well as educational institutions, including classroom dynamics and patterns of bullying, but also the media, for instance, the interplay of sports and war imagery, as well as the virtual monopoly of men in certain forms of crime, including syndicated and white collar crime. In theoretical terms, Connell explicitly accounts for both the more “rational” dimensions of dominance (institutionalized bureaucracies) as well as the “nonrational” dimensions (e.g. sports and war imagery), as shown in Figure 14.4. As Connell and Messerschmidt (ibid, p. 846) state, “Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities . . . Hegemony works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g. professional sports stars), symbols that have authority despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them.”

Figure 14.4 Connell’s Basic Theoretical Orientation



This brings us to a second vital concept in Connell's work: **patriarchal dividend**. Connell uses this term to refer both to the honor and prestige and the more material dividends men accrue under patriarchy, the point being that this dividend is not *uniformly* distributed among men, but it is, nevertheless, universally distributed among them. In other words, though men as a whole may gain from living in a patriarchal gender order, not all gain in the same way or to the same degree. Patriarchal systems are intertwined with a wide variety of other hierarchical relations (e.g. class, race, nation, region, generation, sexual orientation); consequently, not all men receive the same share of the patriarchal dividend.

CONNELL'S THEORETICAL ORIENTATION



As illustrated in Figure 14.4, in terms of the theoretical model used in this book, “patriarchal dividend” and “hegemonic masculinity” might be conceptualized as twin terms, the former highlighting the costs and benefits of the gender order as played out at the level of the individual; the latter highlighting, as indicated previously, dominant *patterns* of masculinity, at both the cultural and social structural levels. As Connell (2000, p. 11) states, “Masculinities are defined collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions.” In other words, in terms of the question of order, Connell's work is thoroughly multidimensional. As a sociologist and historian, Connell is most interested in “collective masculinities,” which she defines as “the patterns of conduct our society defines as masculine” (ibid). She emphasizes not only that there are different types of masculinities in different cultures and periods of history, but also “multiple masculinities” in any particular place and time (ibid). At the same time, however, Connell goes to great lengths to explain “the active construction” of masculinity at the level of the individual (ibid). Connell asserts that “the hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity,” that masculinities are not fixed, and that significant contradictions exist not only at the level of the collective, but at the level of the individual—for instance, in contradictory desires.

In terms of the question of action, as indicated previously, Connell explicitly accounts for both the more “rational” and “nonrational” dimensions of dominance at the level of the collective (for instance, institutionalized bureaucracies, and sports and war imagery), as well as both the conscious and relatively unconscious costs and benefits that accrue from the patriarchal dividend at the level of the individual (for instance, intricate maneuvering in peer groups and competitive sports). Most importantly, Connell's theoretical multidimensionality is rooted not only in her comprehensive analysis of distinct sorts of variables (e.g. the economy, the body, media), but also in her comprehensive analysis of a single variable across space and time. Thus, in the essay you will read below, she maintains that the disadvantages to men that accrue in the current gender order are “the conditions of the advantages. For instance, men cannot be the beneficiaries of women's domestic labor and ‘emotion work’ without many of them losing intimate connections, for instance, with young children” (Connell 2005: 2809).

Reading

Introduction to “Change Among the Gatekeepers”

In this essay, Connell makes three pivotal points regarding gender equality in the global arena. First, Connell argues that men are the “gatekeepers” to equality between men and women in many ways; that is, they have access to resources, authority, and skills that may all be important in social change. The point is that men who believe in gender equality can do a great deal. Second, Connell illuminates the *diversity* of masculinities and men's movements worldwide. For instance, on one hand, homosexual men are mobilizing in antidiscrimination campaigns, the gay liberation movement, and community responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. At the same time, however, there are very large numbers of men engaged in preserving gender inequality. For instance, conservative religious organizations (Christian, Islamic, Buddhist) controlled by men sometimes completely exclude women, and these organizations have often

been used to oppose the emancipation of women; while “transnational media organizations, such as Rupert Murdoch’s conglomerate are equally active in promoting conservative gender ideology,” and “neoliberalism can function as a form of masculinity politics largely because of the powerful role of the state in the gender order” as well (Connell, p. 1816). Finally, Connell (p. 1803) points out that “we now have a far more sophisticated and detailed scientific understanding of issues about men, masculinities, and gender than ever before.” Such that, though clearly given the diversity of masculinity politics it is unrealistic to expect worldwide consensus for gender equality, it is possible that gender equality might someday become *hegemonic* among men.

“Change Among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena” (2005)

R. W. Connell

Equality between women and men has been a doctrine well recognized in international law since the adoption of the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 1958), and as a principle it enjoys popular support in many countries. The idea of gender equal rights has provided the formal basis for the international discussion of the position of women since the 1975–85 UN Decade for Women, which has been a key element in the story of global feminism (Bulbeck 1988). The idea that men might have a specific role in relation to this principle has emerged only recently.

The issue of gender equality was placed on the policy agenda by women. The reason is obvious: it is women who are disadvantaged by the main patterns of gender inequality and who therefore have the claim for redress. Men are, however, necessarily involved in gender-equality reform. Gender inequalities are embedded in a multidimensional structure of relationships between women and men, which, as the modern sociology of gender shows, operates at every level of human experience, from economic arrangements, culture, and the state to interpersonal relationships and individual emotions (Holter 1997; Walby 1997; Connell 2002). Moving toward a gender-equal society involves profound institutional change as well as change in everyday life and personal conduct. To move far in this direction requires

widespread social support, including significant support from men and boys.

Further, the very gender inequalities in economic assets, political power, and cultural authority, as well as the means of coercion, that gender reforms intend to change, currently mean that men (often specific groups of men) control most of the resources required to implement women’s claims for justice. Men and boys are thus in significant ways gatekeepers for gender equality. Whether they are willing to open the gates for major reforms is an important strategic question.

In this article, I will trace the emergence of a worldwide discussion of men and gender-equality reform and will try to assess the prospects of reform strategies involving men. To make such an assessment, it is necessary to set recent policy discussions in the wider context of the cultural problematization of men and boys, the politics of “men’s movements,” the divided interests of men and boys in gender relations, and the growing research evidence about the changing and conflict-ridden social construction of masculinities.

In an article of this scope, it is not possible to address particular national agendas in detail. I will refer to a number of texts where these stories can be found. Because my primary concern is with the global character of the debate, I will give particular attention to

policy discussions in UN forums. These discussions culminated in the 2004 meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which produced the first world-level policy document on the role of men and boys in relation to gender equality (UN Commission on the Status of Women 2004).

MEN AND MASCULINITIES IN THE WORLD GENDER ORDER

In the last fifteen years, in the “developed” countries of the global metropole, there has been a great deal of popular concern with issues about men and boys. Readers in the United States may recall a volume by the poet Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990), which became a huge best seller in the early 1990s, setting off a wave of imitations. This book became popular because it offered, in prophetic language, simple solutions to problems that were increasingly troubling the culture. A therapeutic movement was then developing in the United States, mainly though not exclusively among middle-class men, addressing problems in relationships, sexuality, and identity (Kupers 1993; Schwalbe 1996).

More specific issues about men and boys have also attracted public attention in the developed countries. Men’s responses to feminism, and to gender-equality measures taken by government, have long been the subject of debate in Germany and Scandinavia (Metz-Göckel and Müller 1985; Holter 2003). In anglophone countries there has been much discussion of “the new fatherhood” and of supposed changes in men’s involvement in families (McMahon 1999). There has been public agonizing about boys’ “failure” in school, and in Australia there are many proposals for special programs for boys (Kenway 1997; Lingard 2003). Men’s violence toward women has been the subject of practical interventions and extensive debate (Hearn 1998). There has also been increasing debate about men’s health and illness from a gender perspective (Hurrelmann and Kolip 2002).

Accompanying these debates has been a remarkable growth of research about men’s gender identities and practices, masculinities and the social processes by which they are constructed, cultural and media images of men, and related matters. Academic journals have been founded for specialized research on men and masculinities, there have been many research conferences, and there is a rapidly growing international literature.

We now have a far more sophisticated and detailed scientific understanding of issues about men, masculinities, and gender than ever before (Connell 2003a).

This set of concerns, though first articulated in the developed countries, can now be found worldwide (Connell 2000; Pease and Pringle 2001). Debates on violence, patriarchy, and ways of changing men’s conduct have occurred in countries as diverse as Germany, Canada, and South Africa (Hagemann-White 1992; Kaufman 1993; Morrell 2001a). Issues about masculine sexuality and fatherhood have been debated and researched in Brazil, Mexico, and many other countries (Arihla, Unbehaum Ridenti, and Medrado 1998; Lerner 1998). A men’s center with a reform agenda has been established in Japan, where conferences have been held and media debates about traditional patterns of masculinity and family life continue (Menzu Senta 1997; Roberson and Suzuki 2003). A “traveling seminar” discussing issues about men, masculinities, and gender equality has recently been touring in India (Roy 2003). Debates about boys’ education, men’s identities, and gender change are active from New Zealand to Denmark (Law, Campbell, and Dolan 1999; Reinicke 2002). Debates about men’s sexuality, and changing sexual identities, are also international (Altman 2001).

The research effort is also worldwide. Documentation of the diverse social constructions of masculinity has been undertaken in countries as far apart as Peru (Fuller 2001), Japan (Taga 2001), and Turkey (Sinclair-Webb 2000). The first large-scale comparative study of men and gender relations has recently been completed in ten European countries (Hearn et al. 2002). The first global synthesis, in the form of a world handbook of research on men and masculinities, has now appeared (Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell 2005).

The rapid internationalization of these debates reflects the fact—increasingly recognized in feminist thought (Bulbeck 1998; Marchand and Runyan 2000)—that gender relations themselves have an international dimension. Each of the substructures of gender relations can be shown to have a global dimension, growing out of the history of imperialism and seen in the contemporary process of globalization (Connell 2002). Change in gender relations occurs on a world scale, though not always in the same direction or at the same pace.

The complexity of the patterns follows from the fact that gender change occurs in several different modes. Most dramatic is the direct colonization of the gender order of regions beyond the metropole. There has also

been a more gradual recomposition of gender orders, both those of the colonizing society and the colonized, in the process of colonial interaction. The hybrid gender identities and sexualities now much discussed in the context of postcolonial societies are neither unusual nor new. They are a feature of the whole history of imperialism and are visible in many contemporary studies (e.g., Valdes and Olavarria 1998).

Imperialism and globalization change the conditions of existence for gender orders. For instance, the linking of previously separate production systems changes the flow of goods and services in the gendered division of labor, as seen in the impact of industrially produced foods and textiles on household economies. Colonialism itself often confronted local patriarchies with colonizing patriarchies, producing a turbulent and sometimes very violent aftermath, as in southern Africa (Morrell 1998). Pressure from contemporary Western commercial culture has destabilized gender arrangements, and models of masculinity, in Japan (Ito 1992), the Arab world (Ghoussoub 2000), and elsewhere.

Finally, the emergence of new arenas of social relationship on a world scale creates new patterns of gender relations. Transnational corporations, international communications systems, global mass media, and international state structures (from the United Nations to the European Union) are such arenas. These institutions have their own gender regimes and may form the basis for new configurations of masculinity, as has recently been argued for transnational business (Connell 2000) and the international relations system (Hooper 2001). Local gender orders now interact not only with the gender orders of other local societies but also with the gender order of the global arena.

The dynamics of the world gender order affect men as profoundly as they do women, though this fact has been less discussed. The best contemporary research on men and masculinity, such as Matthew C. Gutmann's (2002) ethnographic work in Mexico, shows in fine detail how the lives of particular groups of men are shaped by globally acting economic and political dynamics.

Different groups of men are positioned very differently in such processes. There is no single formula that accounts for men and globalization. There is, indeed, a growing polarization among men on a world scale. Studies of the "super-rich" (Haseler 2000) show a privileged minority reaching astonishing heights of wealth and power while much larger numbers face poverty, cultural dislocation, disruption of family

relationships, and forced renegotiation of the meanings of masculinity.

Masculinities, as socially constructed configurations of gender practice, are also created through a historical process with a global dimension. The old-style ethnographic research that located gender patterns purely in a local context is inadequate to the reality. Historical research, such as Robert Morrell's (2001b) study of the masculinities of the colonizers in South Africa and T. Dunbar Moodie's (1994) study of the colonized, shows how a gendered culture is created and transformed in relation to the international economy and the political system of empire. There is every reason to think this principle holds for contemporary masculinities.

SHIFTING GROUND: MEN AND BOYS IN GENDER-EQUALITY DEBATES

Because of the way they came onto the agenda of public debate, gender issues have been widely regarded as women's business and of little concern to men and boys. In almost all policy discussions, to adopt a gender perspective substantially means to address women's concerns.

In both national and international policy documents concerned with gender equality, women are the subjects of the policy discourse. The agencies or meetings that formulate, implement, or monitor gender policies usually have names referring to women, such as Department for Women, Women's Equity Bureau, Prefectural Women's Centre, or Commission on the Status of Women. Such bodies have a clear mandate to act for women. They do not have an equally clear mandate to act with respect to men. The major policy documents concerned with gender equality, such as the UN *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* (United Nations [1979] 1989), often do not name men as a group and rarely discuss men in concrete terms.

However, men are present as background throughout these documents. In every statement about women's disadvantages, there is an implied comparison with men as the advantaged group. In the discussions of violence against women, men are implied, and sometimes named, as the perpetrators. In discussions of gender and HIV/AIDS, men are commonly construed as being "the problem," the agents of infection. In discussions of women's exclusion from power and decision making, men are implicitly present as the power holders.

When men are present only as a background category in a policy discourse about women, it is difficult to raise issues about men's and boys' interests, problems, or differences. This could be done only by falling into a backlash posture and affirming "men's rights" or by moving outside a gender framework altogether.

The structure of gender-equality policy, therefore, created an opportunity for antifeminist politics. Opponents of feminism have now found issues about boys and men to be fertile ground. This is most clearly seen in the United States, where authors such as Warren Farreh (1993) and Christina Hoff Sommers (2000), purporting to speak on behalf of men and boys, bitterly accuse feminism of injustice. Men and boys, they argue, are the truly disadvantaged group and need supportive programs in education and health, in situations of family breakup, and so forth. These ideas have not stimulated a social movement, with the exception of a small-scale (though active and sometimes violent) "father's rights" movement in relation to divorce. The arguments have, however, strongly appealed to the neo-conservative mass media, which have given them international circulation. They now form part of the broad neoconservative repertoire of opposition to "political correctness" and to social justice measures.

Some policy makers have attempted to straddle this divide by restructuring gender-equality policy in the form of parallel policies for women and men. For instance, some recent health policy initiatives in Australia have added a "men's health" document to a "women's health" document (Schofield 2004). Similarly, in some school systems a "boys' education" strategy has been added to a "girls' education" strategy (Lingard 2003).

This approach acknowledges the wider scope of gender issues. But it also risks weakening the equality rationale of the original policy. It forgets the relational character of gender and therefore tends to redefine women and men, or girls and boys, simply as different market segments for some service. Ironically, the result may be to promote more gender segregation, not less. This has certainly happened in education, where some privileged boys' schools have jumped on the "gender equality" bandwagon and now market themselves as experts in catering to the special needs of boys.

On the other hand, bringing men's problems into an existing framework of policies for women may weaken the authority that women have so far gathered in that policy area. In the field of gender and development, for instance, some specialists argue that "bringing men

in"—given the larger context in which men still control most of the wealth and institutional authority—may undermine, not help, the drive for gender equality (White 2000). . . .

DIVIDED INTERESTS: SUPPORT AND RESISTANCE

There is something surprising about the worldwide problematizing of men and masculinities, because in many ways the position of men has not greatly changed. For instance, men remain a very large majority of corporate executives, top professionals, and holders of public office. Worldwide, men hold nine out of ten cabinet-level posts in national governments, nearly as many of the parliamentary seats, and most top positions in international agencies. Men, collectively, receive approximately twice the income that women receive and also receive the benefits of a great deal of unpaid household labor, not to mention emotional support, from women (Gierycz 1999; Godenzi 2000; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2003).

The UN Development Program (2003) now regularly incorporates a selection of such statistics into its annual report on world human development, combining them into a "gender-related development index" and a "gender empowerment measure." This produces a dramatic outcome, a league table of countries ranked in terms of gender equality, which shows most countries in the world to be far from gender-equal. It is clear that, globally, men have a lot to lose from pursuing gender equality because men, collectively, continue to receive a patriarchal dividend.

But this way of picturing inequality may conceal as much as it reveals. There are multiple dimensions in gender relations, and the patterns of inequality in these dimensions may be qualitatively different. If we look separately at each of the substructures of gender, we find a pattern of advantages for men but also a linked pattern of disadvantages or toxicity (Connell 2003c).

For instance, in relation to the gender division of labor, men collectively receive the bulk of income in the money economy and occupy most of the managerial positions. But men also provide the workforce for the most dangerous occupations, suffer most industrial injuries, pay most of the taxation, and are under heavier social pressure to remain employed. In the domain of power men collectively control the institutions of coercion and the means of violence (e.g., weapons). But men are also the main targets of military violence and

criminal assault, and many more men than women are imprisoned or executed. Men's authority receives more social recognition (e.g., in religion), but men and boys are underrepresented in important learning experiences (e.g., in humanistic studies) and important dimensions of human relations (e.g., with young children).

One could draw up a balance sheet of the costs and benefits to men from the current gender order. But this balance sheet would not be like a corporate accounting exercise where there is a bottom line, subtracting costs from income. The disadvantages listed above are, broadly speaking, the conditions of the advantages. For instance, men cannot hold state power without some men becoming the agents of violence. Men cannot be the beneficiaries of women's domestic labor and "emotion work" without many of them losing intimate connections, for instance, with young children.

Equally important, the men who receive most of the benefits and the men who pay most of the costs are not the same individuals. As the old saying puts it, generals die in bed. On a global scale, the men who benefit from corporate wealth, physical security, and expensive health care are a very different group from the men who provide the workforce of developing countries. Class, race, national, regional, and generational differences cross-cut the category "men," spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men. There are many situations where groups of men may see their interest as more closely aligned with the women in their communities than with other men. It is not surprising that men respond very diversely to gender-equality politics.

There is, in fact, a considerable history of support for gender equality among men. There is certainly a tradition of advocacy by male intellectuals. In Europe, well before modern gender-equality documents were written, the British philosopher John Stuart Mill published "The Subjection of Women" (1912), which established the presumption of equal rights; and the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, in plays like *A Doll's House* ([1923] 1995), made gender oppression an important cultural theme. In the following generation, the pioneering Austrian psychoanalyst Alfred Adler established a powerful psychological argument for gender equality (Connell 1995). A similar tradition of men's advocacy exists in the United States (Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992). . . .

There is, however, also significant evidence of men's and boys' resistance to change in gender relations. The survey research reveals substantial levels of doubt and

opposition, especially among older men. Research on workplaces and on corporate management has documented many cases where men maintain an organizational culture that is heavily masculinized and unwelcoming to women. In some cases there is active opposition to gender-equality measures or quiet undermining of them (Cockburn 1991; Collinson and Hearn 1996). Research on schools has also found cases where boys assert control of informal social life and direct hostility against girls and against boys perceived as being different. The status quo can be defended even in the details of classroom life, for instance, when a particular group of boys used misogynist language to resist study of a poem that questioned Australian gender stereotypes (Kenworthy 1994; Holland et al. 1998).

Some men accept change in principle but in practice still act in ways that sustain men's dominance of the public sphere and assign domestic labor and child care to women. In strongly gender segregated societies, it may be difficult for men to recognize alternatives or to understand women's experiences (Kandiyoti 1994; Fuller 2001; Meuser 2003). Another type of opposition to reform, more common among men in business and government, rejects gender-equality measures because it rejects all government action in support of equality, in favor of the unfettered action of the market.

The reasons for men's resistance include the patriarchal dividend discussed above and threats to identity that occur with change. If social definitions of masculinity include being the breadwinner and being "strong," then men may be offended by women's professional progress because it makes men seem less worthy of respect. Resistance may also reflect ideological defense of male supremacy. Research on domestic violence suggests that male batterers often hold very conservative views of women's role in the family (Ptacek 1988). In many parts of the world, there exist ideologies that justify men's supremacy on grounds of religion, biology, cultural tradition, or organizational mission (e.g., in the military). It is a mistake to regard these ideas as simply outmoded. They may be actively modernized and renewed.

FOUNDATIONS FOR OPTIMISM: CAPACITIES FOR EQUALITY AND REASONS FOR CHANGE

The public debates about men and boys have often been inconclusive. But they have gone a long way, together with the research, to shatter one widespread belief that has hindered gender reform. This obstacle is the belief

that men *cannot* change their ways, that “boys will be boys,” that rape, war, sexism, domestic violence, aggression, and self-centeredness are natural to men.

We now have many documented examples of the diversity of masculinities and of men’s and boys’ capacity for equality. For instance, life-history research in Chile has shown that there is no unitary Chilean masculinity, despite the cultural homogeneity of the country. While a hegemonic model is widely diffused across social strata, there are many men who depart from it, and there is significant discontent with traditional roles (Valdes and Olavarria 1998). Though groups of boys in schools often have a dominant or hegemonic pattern of masculinity, there are usually also other patterns present, some of which involve more equal and respectful relations with girls.

Research in Britain, for instance, shows how boys encounter and explore alternative models of masculinity as they grow up (Mac an Ghaill 1994; O’Donnell and Sharpe 2000).

Psychological and educational research shows personal flexibility in the face of gender stereotypes. Men and boys can vary, or strategically use, conventional definitions of masculinity. It is even possible to teach boys (and girls) how to do this in school, as experiments in Australian classrooms have shown (Davies 1993; Wetherell and Edley 1999).

Changes have occurred in men’s practices within certain families, where there has been a conscious shift toward more equal sharing of housework and child care. The sociologist Barbara J. Risman (1998), who has documented such cases in one region of the United States, calls them “fair families.” It is clear from her research that the change has required a challenge to traditional models of masculinity. In the Shanghai region of China, there is an established local tradition of relative gender equality, and men are demonstrably willing to be involved in domestic work. Research by Da Wei Wei (Da 2004) shows this tradition persisting among Shanghai men even after migration to another country.

Perhaps the most extensive social action involving men in gender change has occurred in Scandinavia. This includes provisions for paternity leave that have had high rates of take-up, among the most dramatic of all demonstrations of men’s willingness to change gender practices. Øystein Holter sums up the research and practical experience: “The Nordic ‘experiment’ has shown that a *majority* of men can change their practice when circumstances are favorable. . . . When reforms

or support policies are well-designed and targeted towards an on-going cultural process of change, men’s active support for gender-equal status increases” (1997, 126). Many groups of men, it is clear, have a capacity for equality and for gender change. But what reasons for change are men likely to see?

Early statements often assumed that men had the same interest as women in escaping from restrictive sex roles (e.g., Palme 1972). Later experience has not confirmed this view. Yet men and boys often do have substantial reasons to support change, which can readily be listed.

First, men are not isolated individuals. Men and boys live in social relationships, many with women and girls: wives, partners, mothers, aunts, daughters, nieces, friends, classmates, workmates, professional colleagues, neighbors, and so on. The quality of every man’s life depends to a large extent on the quality of those relationships. We may therefore speak of men’s relational interests in gender equality.

For instance, very large numbers of men are fathers, and about half of their children are girls. Some men are sole parents and are then deeply involved in caregiving—an important demonstration of men’s capacity for care (Risman 1986). Even in intact partnerships with women, many men have close relationships with their children, and psychological research shows the importance of these relationships (Kindler 2002). In several parts of the world, young men are exploring more engaged patterns of fatherhood (Olavarria 2001). To make sure that daughters grow up in a world that offers young women security, freedom, and opportunities to fulfil their talents is a powerful reason for many men to support gender equality.

Second, men may wish to avoid the toxic effects that the gender order has for them. James Harrison long ago issued a “Warning: The Male Sex Role May Be Dangerous to Your Health” (1978). Since then health research has documented specific problems for men and boys. Among them are premature death from accident, homicide, and suicide; occupational injury; higher levels of drug abuse, especially of alcohol and tobacco; and in some countries at least, a relative unwillingness by men to seek medical help when it is needed. Attempts to assert a tough and dominant masculinity sustain some of these patterns (Sabo and Gordon 1995; Hurrelmann and Kolip 2002).

Social and economic pressures on men to compete in the workplace, to increase their hours of paid work, and sometimes to take second jobs are among the most

powerful constraints on gender reform. Desire for a better balance between work and life is widespread among employed men. On the other hand, where unemployment is high the lack of a paid job can be a damaging pressure on men who have grown up with the expectation of being breadwinners. This is, for instance, an important gender issue in postapartheid South Africa. Opening alternative economic paths and moving toward what German discussions have called “multioptional masculinities” may do much to improve men’s well-being (*Widersfruche* 1998; Morrell 2001a).

Third, men may support gender change because they see its relevance to the well-being of the community they live in. In situations of mass poverty and underemployment, for instance in cities in developing countries, flexibility in the gender division of labor may be crucial to a household that requires women’s earnings as well as men’s. Reducing the rigidity of masculinities may also yield benefits in security. Civil and international violence is strongly associated with dominating patterns of masculinity and with marked gender inequality in the state. Movement away from these patterns makes it easier for men to adopt historically “feminine” styles of nonviolent negotiation and conflict resolution (Zalewski and Parpart 1998; Breines, Connell, and Eide 2000; Gockburn 2003). This may also reduce the toxic effects of policing and incarceration (Sabo, Rupees, and London 2001).

Finally, men may support gender reform because gender equality follows from their political or ethical principles. These may be religious, socialist, or broad democratic beliefs. Mill argued a case based on classical liberal principles a century and a half ago, and the idea of equal human rights still has purchase among large groups of men.

GROUNDS FOR PESSIMISM: THE SHAPE OF MASCULINITY POLITICS

The diversity among men and masculinities is reflected in a diversity of men’s movements in the developed countries. A study of the United States found multiple movements, with different agendas for the remaking of masculinity. They operated on the varying terrains of gender equality, men’s rights, and ethnic or religious identities (Messner 1997). There is no unified political position for men and no authoritative representative of men’s interests.

Men’s movements specifically concerned with gender equality exist in a number of countries. A well-known

example is the White Ribbon Campaign, dedicated to mobilizing public opinion and educating men and boys for the prevention of men’s violence against women. Originating in Canada, in response to the massacre of women in Montreal in 1989, the White Ribbon Campaign achieved very high visibility in that country, with support from political and community leaders and considerable outreach in schools and mass media. More recently, it has spread to other countries. Groups concerned with violence prevention have appeared in other countries, such as Men against Sexual Assault in Australia and Men Overcoming Violence (MOVE) in the United States. These have not achieved the visibility of the White Ribbon Campaign but have built up a valuable body of knowledge about the successes and difficulties of organizing among men (Lichterman 1989; Pease 1997; Kaufman 1999).

The most extensive experience of any group of men organizing around issues of gender and sexual politics is that of homosexual men, in antidiscrimination campaigns, the gay liberation movement, and community responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Gay men have pioneered in areas such as community care for the sick, community education for responsible sexual practices, representation in the public sector, and overcoming social exclusion, which are important for all groups of men concerned with gender equality (Kippax et al. 1993; Altman 1994).

Explicit backlash movements also exist but have not generally had a great deal of influence. Men mobilizing as men to oppose women tend to be seen as cranks or fanatics. They constantly exaggerate women’s power. And by defining men’s interests in opposition to women’s, they get into cultural difficulties, since they have to violate a main tenet of modern patriarchal ideology—the idea that “opposites attract” and that men’s and women’s needs, interests, and choices are complementary.

Much more important for the defense of gender inequality are movements in which men’s interests are a side effect—nationalist, ethnic, religious, and economic movements. Of these, the most influential on a world scale is contemporary neoliberalism—the political and cultural promotion of free-market principles and individualism and the rejection of state control.

Neoliberalism is in principle gender neutral. The “individual” has no gender, and the market delivers advantage to the smartest entrepreneur, not to men or women as such. But neoliberalism does not pursue social justice in relation to gender. In Eastern Europe, the restoration of capitalism and the arrival of neoliberal

politics have been followed by a sharp deterioration in the position of women. In rich Western countries, neoliberalism from the 1980s on has attacked the welfare state, on which far more women than men depend; supported deregulation of labor markets, resulting in increased casualization of women workers; shrunk public sector employment, the sector of the economy where women predominate; lowered rates of personal taxation, the main basis of tax transfers to women; and squeezed public education, the key pathway to labor market advancement for women. However, the same period saw an expansion of the human-rights agenda, which is, on the whole, an asset for gender equality.

The contemporary version of neoliberalism, known as neoconservatism in the United States, also has some gender complexities. George W. Bush was the first U.S. president to place a woman in the very heart of the state security apparatus, as national security adviser to the president. And some of the regime's actions, such as the attack on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, were defended as a means of emancipating women.

Yet neoconservatism and state power in the United States and its satellites such as Australia remain overwhelmingly the province of men—indeed, men of a particular character: power oriented and ruthless, restrained by little more than calculations of likely opposition. There has been a sharp remasculinization of political rhetoric and a turn to the use of force as a primary instrument in policy. The human rights discourse is muted and sometimes completely abandoned (as in the U.S. prison camp for Muslim captives at Guantanamo Bay and the Australian prison camps for refugees in the central desert and Pacific islands).

Neoliberalism can function as a form of masculinity politics largely because of the powerful role of the state in the gender order. The state constitutes gender relations in multiple ways, and all of its gender policies affect men. Many mainstream policies (e.g., in economic and security affairs) are substantially about men without acknowledging this fact (Nagel 1998; O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Connell 2003b).

This points to a realm of institutional politics where men's and women's interests are very much at stake, without the publicity created by social movements. Public-sector agencies (Jensen 1998; Mackay and Bilton 2000; Schofield, forthcoming), private-sector corporations (Marchand and Runyan 2000; Hearn and Parkin 2001), and unions (Gorman et al. 1993; Pranzway 2001) are all sites of masculinized power and struggles

for gender equality. In each of these sites, some men can be found with a commitment to gender equality, but in each case that is an embattled position. For gender-equality outcomes, it is important to have support from men in the top organizational levels, but this is not often reliably forthcoming.

One reason for the difficulty in expanding men's opposition to sexism is the role of highly conservative men as cultural authorities and managers. Major religious organizations, in Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, are controlled by men who sometimes completely exclude women, and these organizations have often been used to oppose the emancipation of women. Transnational media organizations such as Rupert Murdoch's conglomerate are equally active in promoting conservative gender ideology.

A specific address to men is found in the growing institutional, media, and business complex of commercial sports. With its overwhelming focus on male athletes; its celebration of force, domination, and competitive success; its valorization of male commentators and executives; and its marginalization and frequent ridicule of women, the sports/business complex has become an increasingly important site for representing and defining gender. This is not traditional patriarchy. It is something new, welding exemplary bodies to entrepreneurial culture. Michael Messner (2002), one of the leading analysts of contemporary sports, formulates the effect well by saying that commercial sports define the renewed centrality of men and of a particular version of masculinity.

On a world scale, explicit backlash movements are of limited importance, but very large numbers of men are nevertheless engaged in preserving gender inequality. Patriarchy is defended diffusely. There is support for change from equally large numbers of men, but it is an uphill battle to articulate that support. That is the political context with which new gender-equality initiatives have to deal.

WAYS FORWARD: TOWARD A GLOBAL FRAMEWORK

Inviting men to end men's privileges, and to remake masculinities to sustain gender equality, strikes many people as a strange or Utopian project. Yet this project is already under way. Many men around the world are engaged in gender reforms, for the good reasons discussed above.

The diversity of masculinities complicates the process but is also an important asset. As this diversity becomes better known, men and boys can more easily see a range of possibilities for their own lives, and both men and women are less likely to think of gender inequality as unchangeable. It also becomes possible to identify specific groups of men who might engage in alliances for change.

The international policy documents discussed above rely on the concept of an alliance between men and women for achieving equality. Since the growth of an autonomous women's movement, the main impetus for reform has been located in women's groups. Some groups within the women's movement, especially those concerned with men's violence, are reluctant to work with men or are deeply skeptical of men's willingness to change. Other feminists argue that alliances between women and men are possible, even crucial. In some social movements, for instance, environmentalism, there is a strong ideology of gender equality and a favorable environment for men to support gender change (Connell 1995; Segal 1997).

In local and central government, practical alliances between women and men have been important in achieving equal-opportunity measures and other gender-equality reforms. Even in the field of men's violence against women, there has been cooperation between women's groups and men's groups, for instance, in prevention work. This cooperation can be an inspiration to grassroots workers and a powerful demonstration of women and men's common interest in a peaceful and equal society (Pease 1997; Schofield, forthcoming). The concept of alliance is itself important, in preserving autonomy for women's groups, in preempting a tendency for any one group to speak for others, and in defining a political role for men that has some dignity and might attract widespread support.

Given the spectrum of masculinity politics, we cannot expect worldwide consensus for gender equality. What is possible is that support for gender equality might become hegemonic among men. In that case it would be groups supporting equality that provide the agenda for public discussion about men's lives and patterns of masculinity. . . .



■ JUDITH BUTLER (1957–): A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Judith Butler was born in 1956. She received her BA in philosophy from Bennington College in 1978 and her PhD in philosophy from Yale University in 1984. Butler has taught at Wesleyan and Johns Hopkins Universities and is currently professor of rhetoric and comparative literature at the University of California at Berkeley. Butler's books include *Subjects of Desire* (1999), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1989), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), and *Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performance* (1997), which analyzes name-calling as both a social injury and the way in which individuals are called into action for political purposes.

■ BUTLER'S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES AND CORE IDEAS

Whereas feminists committed to modern ideas about gender ask the question "And what about women?" postmodern feminists, such as Judith Butler, ask "And what do you *mean* by 'women'?" Butler ([1990] 1999:145–47) rejects the very idea that "women" can be understood as a concrete category at all, construing gender identity instead as an unstable "fiction." She criticizes modern feminists for remaining within the confines of traditional binary categories that in her view necessarily perpetuate sexism. In keeping with Foucault (see Chapter 15), Butler provides a "critical genealogy of gender categories in . . . different discursive domains" ([1990] 1999:xxx). In short, while modern feminists had in separating

(biologically determined) “sex” from (socially constructed) “gender” helped rupture the idea of a stable or essential self, Butler takes this rupture to an extreme by upending the alleged “biological” dimensions of sexuality. Far from seeing “desire” as a biological given, Butler ([1990] 1999:70) maintains that “which pleasures shall live and which shall die is often a matter of which serve the legitimating practices of identity formation that take place within the matrix of gender norms.”

Specifically, Butler conceptualizes gendered subjectivity as a fluid identity and contends that the individual subject is never exclusively “male” or “female” but rather, is always in a state of contextually dependent flux. That is, gendered subjectivity is not something “fixed” or “essential,” but a continual performance. Gender is not “a singular act, but a representation and a ritual” (1999:xv). Consequently, Butler (1993) seeks to explain the conditions of performances; that is, she seeks to explain “the practice by which gendering occurs,” for the embodying of norms is “a compulsory practice, a forcible production,” repeated, although “not fully determining.”

Indeed, it is the sustained, continual nature of gender performance that compels Butler to use the term **performativity** rather than “performance.” Performativity contests the very notion of a subject. Whereas the noun “performance” implies distinct, concrete, finished events, the term “performativity” reflects “culturally sustained temporal duration.” As Butler (1999:xv) states,

The view that gender is performative show[s] that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. In this way, it show[s] that what we take to be an “internal” feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, an hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures.

So, too, is the “culturally sustained” (rather than essentialist) nature of gender performances evident in Butler’s discussion of performative *acts*, which she conceptualizes as “forms of authoritative speech . . . [or] statements that, “*in uttering . . . exercise a binding power*” (1993:224, emphasis added); as Butler maintains,

Implicated in a network of authorization and punishment, performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations, declarations of ownership, statements which not only perform an action, but confer a binding power on the action performed. If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse. (1993:224, emphasis added)

In other words, for Butler, “what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (ibid.:xv). “Gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real” (ibid.:xxviii). Just as in Kafka’s “Before the Law,” where one sits before the door of the law awaiting that authority to be distributed, so, too, gender is “an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates” (1999:xiv).

This brings us to the issue of **queer theory**. In addition to being a leading feminist theorist, Butler is one of the most important figures in queer theory. Queer theory emerged from gay/lesbian studies (which emerged from gender studies) in the 1980s. Up until the 1980s, the term “queer” had a derogatory connotation, meaning “odd” or “peculiar” or “out of the ordinary.” However, queer theorists, including Butler, appropriated this term, insisting that all sexual behaviors, all concepts linking sexual behaviors to sexual identities, and all categories of normative and deviant sexualities are social constructs, which create certain types of social meaning. In short, “sex is a norm” (Osborne and Segel, 1993).

Thus, the undergirding emphasis in all these projects (gay/lesbian, queer, feminist) is that the categories of normative and deviant sexual behavior are not biologically but rather socially constructed. In contrast to those who see sexuality as biological and gender as a social construction, Butler sees sex as no more a natural category than gender. She conceptualizes gender norms as structuring biology and not the reverse, which informs the more conventional view.

Butler does not deny certain kinds of biological differences, but she seeks to explain under what discursive and institutional conditions do certain arbitrary biological differences become salient characteristics of sex (*ibid.*). She emphasizes that sexuality is a complex array of individual activity and institutional power, of social codes and forces, which interact to shape the ideas of what is normative and what is deviant at any particular moment, and which then result in categories as to “natural,” “essential,” “biological,” or “god-given.” She seeks to show how a norm can actually materialize a body, that is, how the body is not only invested with a norm but in some sense is also animated by a norm or contoured by a norm (*ibid.*).



Photo 14.2 Harris Glenn Milstead (1945–1988), better known by his drag persona, Divine, who starred in several of John Waters's films, including *Hairspray*, exemplifies performativity.

Specifically, Butler describes a **heterosexual matrix** in which “proper men” and “proper women” are identified as heterosexual. She shows that the essential unity between biological sex, gender identification, and heterosexuality is not dictated by nature; indeed, this unity is an illusion mediated through cultural systems of meaning that underlie our understanding of material, anatomical differences. According to Butler, heterosexual normativity “ought *not* to order gender” ([1990] 1999:xiv, emphasis in original). The subversion of gender performances (e.g., drag performances) indicates nothing about sexuality or sexual practice. “Gender can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorientating normative sexuality at all” (*ibid.*).

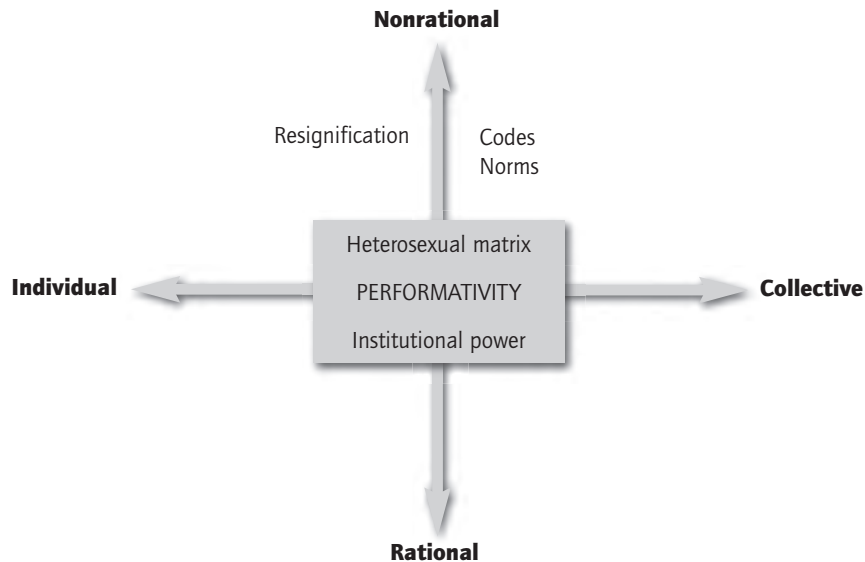
Thus, for instance, Butler points out that discrimination against gays is a function not of their sexuality but of their failure to perform heterosexual gender norms. Heterosexuality is a highly unstable system that relies on carefully constructed individual performances of identity, and the exclusion of homosexuality. Because heterosexuality is based on a binary difference between male and female (a person is either one or the other), there is a socially constructed gender in which heterosexuality is central, which informs our understanding of biology.

Interestingly, then, akin to Harold Garfinkel’s “breaching” experiments, which exposed taken-for-granted normative expectations (see Chapter 13), cross-dressing, “kiss-ins,” gender parodies, and so on can be used to transgress and rebel against existing sexual categories. In short, queer politics seeks to explicitly challenge gender norms to show their lack of naturalness and inevitability and to celebrate transgressions from them (Alsop, et al. 2002:96), while postmodern queer theorists seek to upend and “resignify” our gender expectations.

■ BUTLER’S THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

As will be discussed further in the next chapter, postmodernists tend to eschew metatheoretical frameworks as “essentializing.” However, it is difficult not to see postmodernists, including Butler, as nonrationalistic in their approach to action. That “there is no reality” anymore (only “hyperreality”—Baudrillard—see Chapter 15); that sex is not a “natural” category but constituted through social discourse; that performances create subjectivities (see Butler, this chapter) seems a profoundly nonrationalistic orientation to action. In contrast to Goffman, who, as we have seen (see Chapter 12), also at times used the term “performance” in a more rationalistic way (wittingly constructed, via calculation and even rehearsal), Butler argues that we become subjects *from* our performances. Subjectivity is a process of submitting ourselves to socially constituted norms and practices (Alsop, et al. 2002:98). This speaks to the nonrational realm.

In terms of order, on one hand postmodernists such as Butler emphasize the role of structured “scripts,” discourses, and preexisting symbolic patterns that reflect a collective orientation. In addition, Butler exudes a neo-Marxist emphasis on hierarchical (class, gender, racial) structures, oppression, and corporate control, which also speaks to the collective realm (see Chapters 3 and 10). She shows how gender

Figure 14.5 Butler's Basic Theoretical Orientation

performances are tied to relations of ruling, in Smith's terms. On the other hand, however, like Foucault (see Chapter 15), Butler insists that regulatory norms and discourses are never wholly determining. One could argue that in the end, Butler's work seems individualistic because she emphasizes that it is in interaction that subjectivities are formed. Moreover, in contrast to cultural Marxists (e.g., the Frankfurt School), Butler optimistically asserts that because of the multiplicity of symbols that cannot all be obeyed coherently, we can "reconfigure" and "redeploy" symbols. However, again it must be emphasized that Butler would undoubtedly chafe at this label. First, because Butler goes to great lengths to show that performances are never isolated acts, but occur only *within* specific discursive contexts, and second, because she would chafe at any sort of metatheoretical label at all. The whole point of postmodernism is to do away with this kind of academic theoretical scaffolding. In keeping with the spirit of Butler, then, we place the notion of "performativity" at the center of our theoretical map, thereby indicating its fluid, multidimensional nature, while nevertheless acknowledging its nonrational bent (see Figure 14.5).

Reading

Introduction to "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire"

The following excerpt is from Butler's most widely read and celebrated book, *Gender Trouble* (1990), which has sold more than 100,000 copies. Here you will see Butler challenge the presumed universality and unity of the concept of "woman" in feminist theory and, drawing on Foucault, dispute the predominant binary opposition of sex as a "biological" and gender as a "cultural" category.

"Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" (1990)

Judith Butler

One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.
—Simone de Beauvoir

Strictly speaking, "women" cannot be said to exist.
—Julia Kristeva

Woman does not have a sex.
—Luce Irigaray

*The deployment of sexuality . . . established this
notion of sex.*
—Michel Foucault

*The category of sex is the political category that
founds society as heterosexual.*
—Monique Wittig

I. "WOMEN" AS THE SUBJECT OF FEMINISM

For the most part, feminist theory has assumed that there is some existing identity, understood through the category of women, who not only initiates feminist interests and goals within discourse, but constitutes the subject for whom political representation is pursued. But *politics* and *representation* are controversial terms. On the one hand, *representation* serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women. This has seemed obviously important considering the pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all.

Recently, this prevailing conception of the relation between feminist theory and politics has come under challenge from within feminist discourse. The very

subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of "the subject" as the ultimate candidate for representation or, indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women. The domains of political and linguistic "representation" set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject. In other words, the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation can be extended.

Foucault points out that juridical systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent. Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures. If this analysis is right, then the juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as "the subject" of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics. And the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation. This becomes politically problematic if that system can be shown to produce gendered subjects along a differential axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine. In such cases, an uncritical appeal to such a system for the emancipation of "women" will be clearly self-defeating.

The question of "the subject" is crucial for politics, and for feminist politics in particular, because juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not "show" once the juridical

structure of politics has been established. In other words, the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation. Juridical power inevitably “produces” what it claims merely to represent; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of “a subject before the law” in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law’s own regulatory hegemony. It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of “women,” the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.

Indeed, the question of women as the subject of feminism raises the possibility that there may not be a subject who stands “before” the law, awaiting representation in or by the law. Perhaps the subject, as well as the invocation of a temporal “before,” is constituted by the law as the fictive foundation of its own claim to legitimacy. The prevailing assumption of the ontological integrity of the subject before the law might be understood as the contemporary trace of the state of nature hypothesis, that foundationalist fable constitutive of the juridical structures of classical liberalism. The performative invocation of a nonhistorical “before” becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and, thereby, constitute the legitimacy of the social contract.

Apart from the foundationalist fictions that support the notion of the subject, however, there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term *women* denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety. As Denise Riley’s title suggests, *Am I That Name?* is a question produced by the very possibility of the name’s multiple significations. If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical

contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. Where those various contexts have been consulted within such theories, it has been to find “examples” or “illustrations” of a universal principle that is assumed from the start. That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a “Third World” or even an “Orient” in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism. The urgency of feminism to establish a universal status for patriarchy in order to strengthen the appearance of feminism’s own claims to be representative has occasionally motivated the shortcut to a categorial or fictive universality of the structure of domination, held to produce women’s common subjugated experience.

Although the claim of universal patriarchy no longer enjoys the kind of credibility it once did, the notion of a generally shared conception of “women,” the corollary to that framework, has been much more difficult to displace. Certainly, there have been plenty of debates: Is there some commonality among “women” that pre-exists their oppression, or do “women” have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? Is there a specificity to women’s cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures? Are the specificity and integrity of women’s cultural or linguistic practices always specified against and, hence, within the terms of some more dominant cultural formation? Is there a region of the “specifically feminine,” one that is both differentiated from the masculine as such and recognizable in its difference by an unmarked and, hence, presumed universality of “women”? The masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in

which that specificity can be recognized, but in every other way the “specificity” of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated off analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations that both constitute “identity” and make the singular notion of identity a misnomer.

My suggestion is that the presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions. Indeed, the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from “women” whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics. The suggestion that feminism can seek wider representation for a subject that it itself constructs has the ironic consequence that feminist goals risk failure by refusing to take account of the constitutive powers of their own representational claims. This problem is not ameliorated through an appeal to the category of women for merely “strategic” purposes, for strategies always have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended. In this case, exclusion itself might qualify as such an unintended yet consequential meaning. By conforming to a requirement of representational politics that feminism articulate a stable subject, feminism thus opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation.

Obviously, the political task is not to refuse representational politics—as if we could. The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices. As such, the critical point of departure is *the historical present*, as Marx put it. And the task is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize.

Perhaps there is an opportunity at this juncture of cultural politics, a period that some would call “post-feminist,” to reflect from within a feminist perspective on the injunction to construct a subject to feminism. Within feminist political practice, a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity appears to be necessary in order to formulate a representational

politics that might revive feminism on other grounds. On the other hand, it may be time to entertain a radical critique that seeks to free feminist theory from the necessity of having to construct a single or abiding ground which is invariably contested by those identity positions or anti-identity positions that it invariably excludes. Do the exclusionary practices that ground feminist theory in a notion of “women” as subject paradoxically undercut feminist goals to extend its claims to “representation”?

Perhaps the problem is even more serious. Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations? And is not such a reification precisely contrary to feminist aims? To what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix? If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite, if not a political goal.

To trace the political operations that produce and conceal what qualifies as the juridical subject of feminism is precisely the task of a *feminist genealogy* of the category of women. In the course of this effort to question “women” as the subject of feminism, the unproblematic invocation of that category may prove to *preclude* the possibility of feminism as a representational politics. What sense does it make to extend representation to subjects who are constructed through the exclusion of those who fail to conform to unspoken normative requirements of the subject? What relations of domination and exclusion are inadvertently sustained when representation becomes the sole focus of politics? The identity of the feminist subject ought not to be foundation of feminist politics, if the formation of the subject takes place within a field of power regularly buried through the assertion of that foundation. Perhaps, paradoxically, “representation” will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject of “women” is nowhere presumed.

II. THE COMPULSORY ORDER OF SEX/GENDER/DESIRE

Although the unproblematic unity of “women” is often invoked to construct a solidarity of identity, a split is

introduced in the feminist subject by the distinction between sex and gender. Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction the permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex.

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of “men” will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that “women” will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifact, with the consequence 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.

This radical splitting of the gendered subject poses yet another set of problems. Can we refer to a “given” sex or a “given” gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means? And what is “sex” anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and how is a feminist critic to

assess the scientific discourses which purport to establish such “facts” for us? Does sex have a history? Does each sex have a different history, or histories? Is there a history of how the duality of sex was established, a genealogy that might expose the binary options as a variable construction? Are the ostensibly natural facts of sex discursively produced by various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests? If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.

It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts. This construction of “sex” as the radically unconstructed will concern us again in the discussion of Lévi-Strauss and structuralism, [but] at this juncture it is already clear that one way the internal stability and binary frame for sex is effectively secured is by casting the duality of sex in a prediscursive domain. This production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of cultural construction designated by *gender*. How, then, does gender need to be reformulated to encompass the power relations that produce the effect of a prediscursive sex and so conceal that very operation of discursive production?

Discussion Questions

1. Dorothy Smith (1987:64) states, “So as I walk down the street keeping an eye on my dog I am observing some of the niceties of different forms of property ownership.” In what ways do you “do class” in your everyday life? In what ways do you

“do gender”? How do your class and gender performances reaffirm forms of domination? To what extent do your gender performances reflect, reaffirm, and/or challenge normative heterosexuality or what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix?

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2. According to Smith (1987:68), “The role of women is central both in the work that is done and in the management of its routine daily order . . . whatever the relations between school achievement, career success, and the ‘intricate psychosocial processes’ of the family, the conscious, planned thoughtful work of women as mothers has been part of its actuality.” Discuss the extent to which “behind-the-scenes” women’s work is still taken for granted in both schools and the workplace today. Do you think that this aspect of gender roles has changed in the past 20 years? How so or why not? Do you think full gender equality can be achieved? Why or why not?

3. According to Collins (1990:228), “A matrix of domination contains few pure victims or oppressors. Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems

of oppression which frame everyone’s lives.” Give concrete examples of moments or situations in which you have found yourself a “victim” and concrete examples of moments or situations in which you found yourself an “oppressor.” Explain how your examples reflect the matrix of domination at the level of personal biography, the community, and the systemic level of social institutions.

4. Discuss the neo-Marxist or critical dimensions of Smith, Collins, Connell and Butler. In addition to critical theory, what other traditions and concepts does each draw from to produce their own distinct perspective?

5. Compare and contrast Butler’s conceptualization of “performativity” with Goffman’s dramaturgical theory (Chapter 12).