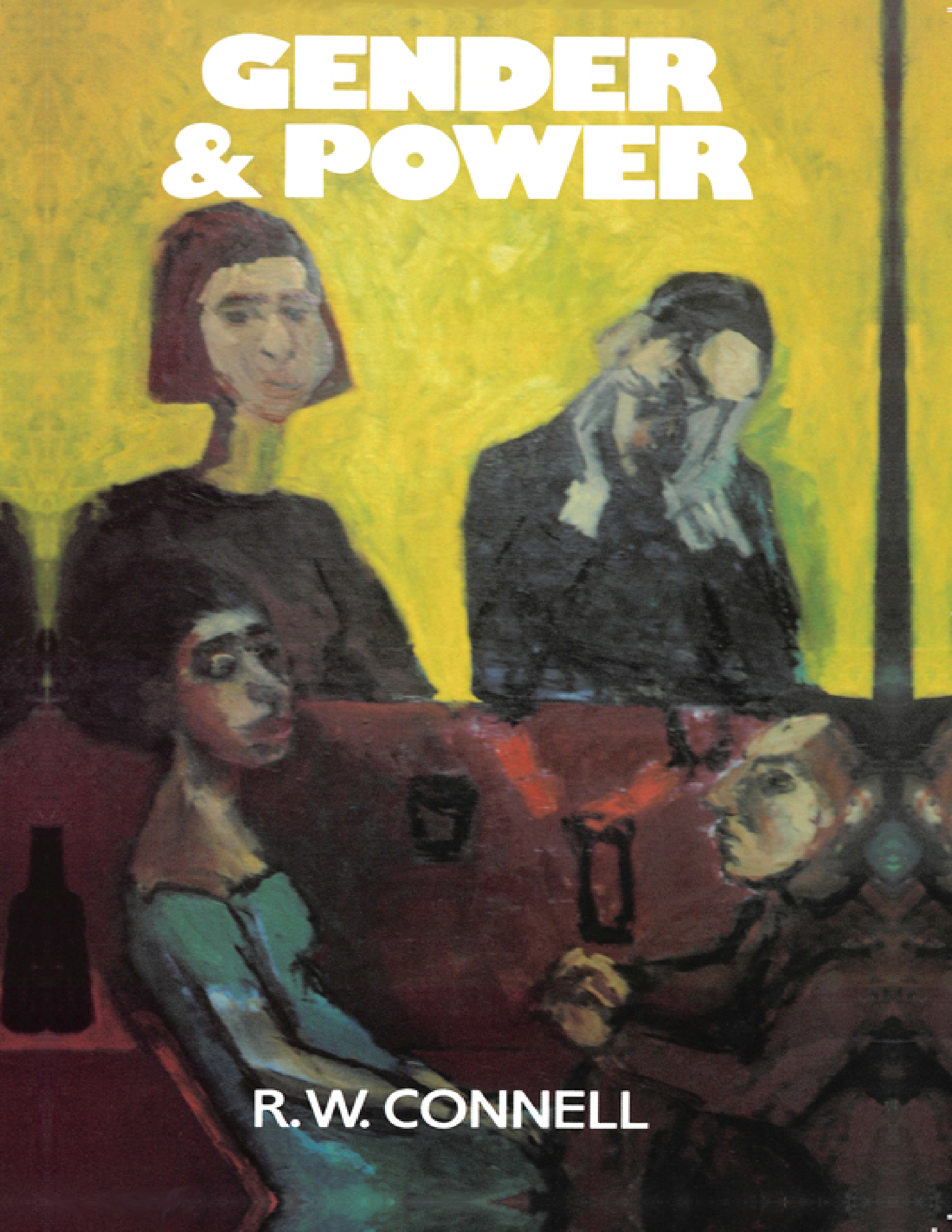
GENDER & POWER



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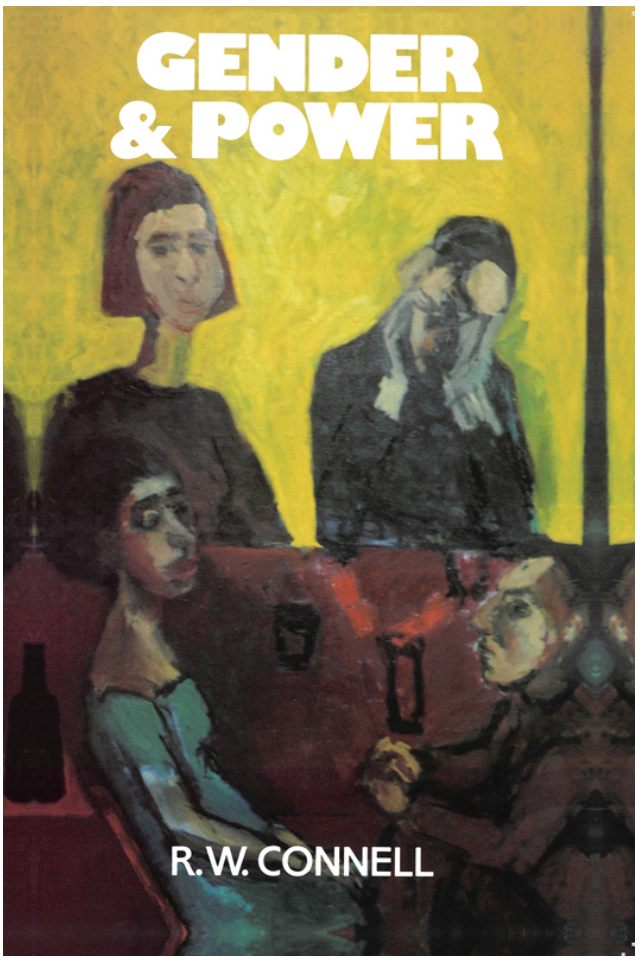
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Society, the Person and
Sexual Politics

R. W. Connell

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The Child's Construction of Politics (1971)
Politics of the Extreme Right: Warringah 1966 (1967), with F. Gould

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Preface

The radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s opened debates about a range of practical issues to do with sex and gender, ranging from sexual expression to economic inequality, police violence against gays, and rape. Naming these issues, the new feminist and gay politics also posed theoretical questions and began to grow a theoretical language: ‘sexual politics’, ‘oppression’, ‘patriarchy’.

By the mid 1970s when these terms were common currency, it was clear to anyone willing to listen that women’s liberation and gay liberation required a profound change in our ways of understanding society. Sexual politics brought to light patterns of power, interest and conflict which made little sense in terms of socialist class analysis, conventional economics, political science pluralism or sociological functionalism. A theoretical revolution in the social sciences was called for.

This has been slow in coming. It was not clear what kind of theory would be adequate to understand the world of sexual politics. Attempts were made to adapt existing ideas. A quiet academic backwater, ‘sex role’ research, suddenly found itself enormously popular and influential. Biology was roped in to explain matters the biologists themselves hardly dreamed of. Rival schools of thought emerged within feminism, debating the universality of patriarchy, the usefulness of psychoanalysis, the impact of capitalism, the significance of men’s sexual violence. Theorists of gay liberation searched for inspiration through psychoanalysis,

Marxism, anticolonialism and the emerging theories of discourse. By the early 1980s one influential school of feminism was abandoning the basic theoretical assumption of ten years before, the fundamentally social character of gender.

This book is an attempt to resolve some of the difficulties raised by these controversies and to propose the outline of a systematic social theory of gender. That is a generous ambition and one person's work can only be a fragment of the enterprise. But given the state of the problem it seemed timely to try out a large synthesis, to suggest how the different issues about gender might fit together. The argument, accordingly, ranges over a very wide field and the research has led me into some unexpected corners – from the archaeology of ancient south-west Asia (trying to get some grip on the evidence for feminist 'origins' arguments) to the lesser-known followers of Freud. It is inevitable that some parts of the analysis are thin, and some are relatively abstract or speculative. When there was a choice I put more time into problems that seemed relatively neglected, such as the institutionalization of gender, than into issues now widely studied, such as sexual ideology.

The basis of the synthesis, the logical starting-point, is the nature of social reality itself. Arguments about gender are plagued by an assumption that what is biological or 'natural' is somehow more real than what is social. For instance it was often suggested in the early 1970s that sex roles were 'artificial' because they were socially created (by media, schools or whatever). There was a sense that if you poked a finger at them it would go right through. Since then a good many fingers have been poked and they did not go through. Sexist stereotypes are still with us, showing impressive toughness and resilience. Social process has its own power to constrain, its own resistance to dissolution. And yet it is

entirely human. The oppression of women and gays is a matter of human agency, not of nature.

How to get a good understanding of these qualities has been a central issue in social theory over the last thirty years, and an uncommonly difficult one. The debates around structuralism in the 1970s got badly hung up on a contradiction between the impersonality and the humanness of social process. There is, however, an approach emerging in social theory that has a more convincing answer, though it is still not widely known outside a technical readership. One of its sources is the theory of practice derived by philosophical critiques of mainstream Marxism; another is the dualist or recursive models of the relation between structure and practice developed in theoretical sociology; and a third is the contextual analysis of the self, personal action and intersubjectivity developing in social psychology.

There is no commonly accepted term for this approach; I will call it the ‘theory of practice’ for short. It seems to me consistent with the best current research on gender and sexual politics, and to offer resolutions of some of the dilemmas the theory of gender has run into. Accordingly the general approach of the book is to bring together the theory of practice with the problems of sexual politics. This is far from being a one-way trade, an ‘application’; it has involved reformulations of both. One of the unexpected outcomes was a demand for a practice-based approach to personality, which grew equally from a general principle of historicity, the findings of psychoanalysis and the experience of sexual liberation movements.

The reasons for undertaking the enterprise were partly that I wanted to understand the problems myself and partly that theory is important, at least in the long run, for practical politics. Bad theories will do harm. There are enough dilemmas and strategic conflicts in sexual politics to

make a decent theory of gender a tangible asset for progressive politics of many kinds.

But theories don't grow on trees; theorizing is itself a social practice with a politics. Most of the radical theorizing of gender has been done by women or by gay men. I am a heterosexual man, married, middle-aged, with a tenured academic job in an affluent country – in world terms one of the very rich and secure. I owe an account of what I am doing here.

There is a view put by the 1970s 'men's movement' in the United States that 'men are equally oppressed'. This claim is demonstrably false. Some of the relevant evidence is set out below in chapter 1, which is intended as an introduction to the facts of gender inequality for those not already familiar with the issue.

Men in general are advantaged by current social structure, heterosexual men more so than others. What the debate about 'men's liberation' nevertheless showed is that there are costs for men in their social advantages, sometimes serious ones. It also showed that there are some groups of men who can recognize injustice when they see it and are far from comfortable with the position they have inherited.

For me, this discontent had several sources. I have been uneasy with conventional masculinity almost as long as I can remember, certainly since I was a teenager. I am not sure why; there may be an answer in what Dorothy Dinnerstein says in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* about the men who became student activists in the 1960s. At all events my attachment to masculinity was sufficiently fractured to make me sit up and take notice when the women of that generation mobilized in their own liberation movement. I read books like Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* as well as those of the 'Freudian Left' and listened to a great deal of discussion about feminist principles and programs. A commitment to a socialism that stressed the

theme of equality rather than textbook Marxism was probably important. Certainly important was the fact of living with a woman who was working on projects like setting up a women's health centre, and the fact of working in university departments alongside people engaged in feminist research.

I became convinced fairly early that the main feminist arguments about inequality and oppression were right. Somewhat later, I became convinced that they required a thoroughgoing reconstruction of socialist politics and the social sciences. Later again, that gay liberation raised crucial theoretical questions that were part of the same set of issues. Finally, that this was also the business of heterosexual men, who have some specific jobs to do (e.g. in the politics of masculinity) but also ought to be involved in the general analysis of sexual politics.

That is not necessarily easy to do. On the one hand men's settled ways of thinking have to be disrupted. The slow progress in getting issues of gender recognized in the mainstream of academic disciplines like history, economics or psychology, long dominated by men, illustrates the resistance. On the other hand there are currents in feminist thought which do not welcome men's involvement, and there is a fine line to tread between intruding on women's business and sharing the work on common problems. Even sympathetic men writing about feminism have attracted some pretty fierce responses. I do things in this book that a purist might not do, such as discussing the strategies of feminist movements. The reason is that no one of either sex can make an extended analysis of sexual politics without touching on these issues.

The number of heterosexual men working on these issues is still small. I don't think there is anything in itself admirable about being a dissident. I look forward to the day when a majority of men, as well as a majority of women,

accept the absolute equality of the sexes, accept sharing of childcare and all other forms of work, accept freedom of sexual behaviour, and accept multiplicity of gender forms, as being plain common sense and the ordinary basis of civilized life.

If the number of people working to turn these principles into practice is to grow into settled majorities, there have to be good reasons why people will accept them as principles. These reasons need not all be the same. Sexual politics, like politics in other fields, is a matter of constructing coalitions. For some groups the reasons flow straightforwardly from a collective interest in change. The catch is always with heterosexual men, whose collective interest – as the evidence through the book confirms – is broadly to maintain the existing system. What reasons for change have enough weight, against this entrenched interest, to detach heterosexual men from the defence of patriarchy? There are, in my experience, five.

(1) Even the beneficiaries of an oppressive system can come to see its oppressiveness, especially the way it poisons areas of life they share.

(2) Heterosexual men are often committed in important ways to women – their wives and lovers, mothers and sisters, daughters and nieces, co-workers – and may desire better lives for them. Especially they may see the point of creating more civilized and peaceable sexual arrangements for their children, even at the cost of their own privileges.

(3) Heterosexual men are not all the same or all united, and many do suffer some injury from the present system. The oppression of gays, for instance, has a back-wash damaging to effeminate or unassertive heterosexuals.

(4) Change in gender relations is happening anyway, and on a large scale. A good many heterosexual men recognize

that they cannot cling to the past and want some new directions.

(5) Heterosexual men are not excluded from the basic human capacity to share experiences, feelings and hopes. This ability is often blunted, but the capacity for caring and identification is not necessarily killed. The question is what circumstances might call it out. Being a father often does; some political movements, notably the environmental and peace movements, seem to; sexual politics may do so too.

These are, at least, among the reasons for this book. It is also motivated by personal experience. Over the last fifteen years I have tried to work through issues of sexual politics with other people in my household, my workplaces and the labour movement. Some of this has been very difficult indeed and has convinced me, as no theoretical writing could, of the sheer intractability of gender relations. It has also convinced me that relationships and customary practices do change, that collective projects of reconstruction are possible, and that oppositions of interest can be worked on and sometimes worked through, within such projects.

If social research is to have major value for that enterprise, it must do something more than show where we have come from or describe where we are now – useful as those jobs are. It must also concern itself with strategic issues: with where it is possible to go and how it is possible to get there. It is easy to speculate on these matters, difficult to produce well-founded arguments. Much of the literature on gender cannot do this job because of the way its theory is constructed. It has been one of my main aims to develop forms of analysis that are credible as social theory and which also key in to strategic argument. This is behind the following analyses of interest articulation in

sexual politics, crisis tendencies at the level of the whole society, and the means of reconstructing personality 'from below'. A social theory should also help to formulate the general goals of politics. I think the kind of theory developed here can do this, and the book ends with a discussion of what the ultimate outcomes of progressive sexual politics might be.

This book is the product of ten years' work, not all of which has proceeded smoothly in one direction. My first attempt to get the issues together was an unpublished essay of 1976 called 'Another Coup d'Etat Among Men' (Robin Morgan's joke about socialist revolutions), which sketched a theory of 'hegemonic sexuality' as a meeting-ground for socialism and feminism. About that time I began work with Dean Ashenden, Sandra Kessler and Gary Dowsett on a study of social inequality in secondary schooling, eventually published as *Making the Difference* and *Ockers and Disco-Maniacs.* We started with class inequality but developed an interest in gender and sexuality among teenagers. The interviews and case studies from this project have been important in my thinking ever since and are discussed at several points in this book. How femininity and masculinity are realized among adults, especially in the workplace, became a major theme in the study of teachers that grew out of the same project, *Teachers' Work.* In 1979 I began very hesitantly to work on issues of masculinity, attempting a self-analysis *à la* Karen Horney and writing about the politics of my own relationships and experience of the body. Less hesitantly I began a series of essays on the theory of patriarchy and how to connect it with socialist theory. The few publishable products of these two enterprises were collected in *Which Way is Up?* from which the idea of this book developed. The detailed studies in that book on the concept of social reproduction, Sartre's theory of practice, the connection of patriarchy and capitalism and the nature

of role theory, underlie parts of the argument here, as indicated in the notes. In the 1980s the work on masculinity turned into two new projects. One was a theoretical study, done with Tim Carrigan and John Lee and published as ‘Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity’, which reworked social-scientific studies of masculinity in the light of gay liberation, psychoanalysis and feminism. The other is an empirical study of changes in contemporary masculinity, done jointly with Pip Martin and Norm Radican, which is still in the field. These two projects underlie a good deal of the discussion of personality in Part III.

My work on these issues has been strongly influenced by the work of other people at Macquarie University. Rosemary Pringle’s work on sexuality, on gender and capitalism, and the industry studies that became Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle’s *Gender at Work,* have been a constant point of reference. Sue Kippax introduced me to the new social psychology; Sheila Shaver to the intersections of gender with welfare policy. I have learnt a great deal from several doctoral students with whom I have worked as supervisor: Teresa Brennan, who introduced me to feminist psychoanalysis; Clare Burton, whose book *Subordination* develops a detailed critique of socialist-feminist thought; Tim Carrigan’s work on gay liberation theory; Carol O’Donnell’s work on labour markets in *The Basis of the Bargain;* and the late Di Court, whose work on feminism and the state highlighted the problem of the central structures of power. The continued interest of several generations of undergraduate students has been both a stimulus to do the work and a test of what was produced.

The final stages were made possible by research assistance from Thea Welsh, who is responsible for much of the detail in chapter 1, and Pip Martin, on questions ranging from the membership of the Soviet Communist Party to the recent history of Sydney theatre.

Many people have given feedback to working papers and drafts. I have been helped particularly by comments from Glynn Huilgol, Elizabeth Reid and Hester Eisenstein. Gary Dowsett, Lynne Segal, Rosemary Pringle, John Iremonger and Venetia Nelson read and criticized the whole manuscript. The bulk of the typing in the last few years has been done by Helen Easson, as it was in earlier stages by Heather Williams; the project would not have moved without their skill and critical interest. And I am deeply grateful for the tolerance and friendship of Robyn Dasey, in whose house the whole first draft was written.

Part of the work for this book was funded by the Australian Research Grants Committee with a grant for a study called 'Theory of Class and Patriarchy'. Grants for purely theoretical work are sufficiently rare that this should perhaps be celebrated. Part has been funded by Macquarie University Research Grants and by two periods of study leave from Macquarie University.

My greatest debt by far is to Pam Benton, who has been involved with the project through its whole development and at all its levels – intellectual, practical and emotional. I would like to dedicate the product to our daughter Kylie, in the hope that we can get enough right in this generation to make the world she grows up in a more equal, safe and rational place: less patriarchal and more human.

The plan of the book is straightforward: an introductory sketch of the facts of gender inequalities; three chapters on theories of gender; three chapters on gender as social structure; three chapters on gender as personality; and three chapters on politics and ideology. This plan, however, risks exaggerating the separateness of the parts. A central theoretical idea is that the social and the personal depend on each other and in an earlier draft of the book the chapters on personality came before the chapters on social

structure. I would emphasize that Parts II and III should each be read in the light of the other.

Referencing is a problem with a complex and wide-ranging text, so I have invented my own (condensed) version of the Harvard system. The names of authors are mentioned in the text without dates and the details can be found in the alphabetical bibliography at the back. Any ambiguity about which work of a particular author is cited is explained in the bibliographical notes at the end of each chapter, which are compiled section by section. Here also are references which would have been awkward to include in the main text and discussions of some technicalities which would have interrupted the flow of argument. These notes refer, as in the conventional Harvard system, to the bibliography; with the exception of the notes to chapter 1, which give directly the sources of statistical data used in that chapter alone.

Notes

For an example of the trouble a man can get into when writing about feminism, see the criticisms of David Bouchier's *The Feminist Challenge* by Janet Bujra and others (1984). For the gender dimension of our educational research see Kessler, Ashenden, Connell and Dowsett (1982, 1985).

1

Introduction: Some Facts in the Case

This chapter attempts to show why a social analysis of gender is needed for a comprehension of personal life, politics and society as a whole. It makes out a prima-facie case for the enterprise. Accordingly the facts are set out here with little commentary. Their interpretation is provided by the rest of the book.

The first part of the chapter takes one person – an Australian teenager called Delia Prince – as a point of departure and explores how her circumstances and choices are shaped in terms of sex and gender. Delia has not been chosen to represent a particular 'type'; the point is, rather, that the same kind of analysis would be needed to understand any individual life. The second part of the chapter looks at the collectivities Delia lives in: city, state, country, world. Here I discuss some of the statistical and institutional evidence about sex inequality and sexual politics. This too is illustrative. The topic is vast and only a fragment of the evidence can be recited in a single chapter. But it is perhaps enough to demonstrate the scale and importance of the issues.

A Teenager and her Family

Delia Prince (the name is a pseudonym) is one of the teenagers my colleagues and I interviewed in 1978, along

with their parents and teachers, in the research project later published as *Making the Difference.* The research was an attempt to understand the circumstances, in school, family and workplace, that lay behind the massively greater drop-out rate from working-class high schools compared with ruling-class secondary colleges.

Delia was one of a sample of students from a working-class outer suburb, where she lives with her two parents, older sister and older brother. Like a large proportion of the Australian working class the family owns its own house, a comfortable brick-veneer one, set back behind a high fence. The house was built mainly by Delia's father and a great deal of her mother's energy over the years has gone into keeping its interior gleaming and its garden attractive.

Delia, fifteen at the time we interviewed her, is a cheerful if rather quiet person, past puberty, and already equipped with a steady boyfriend. From her parents' point of view she is doing well, especially as she has come through some serious medical problems and periods in hospital. She 'chatters' with her mother in the kitchen about what goes on at school, does her share of housework without much grumbling and, unlike many of her peers who sneak out at night, observes the family rules about when she can go out. 'Basically just a normal kid' is her mother's summary. Certainly Delia seems everyone's picture of a nice girl.

She loves animals and so would like to become a vet. That is, if she gets good enough marks at school; otherwise she will try for a clerical job in a bank. Her school test results at present are no better than moderate; she is having trouble with maths. She gets along easily with most of her teachers, though there are a couple she has disliked. From their point of view she is not very visible – not a problem, not a star. Apart from her parents' wishes and her own vague ambition to be a veterinarian, there is nothing much to attach her to the school. She confesses that she would prefer to leave this

year, though she expects to go on to the School Certificate assessment and leave at sixteen.

‘Just a normal kid’, yes; but where does that ‘normality’ come from? How is it produced? And isn’t there a little too much of it? If we push back behind the somewhat bland appearance of Delia’s adolescence, some more complex and tension-laden processes might come into view.

To start with the economic circumstances of Delia’s life, Fred Prince, her father, is a tradesman with a certified skill. He does not use this trade in his current job working for a public authority as leading hand in maintenance, in charge of a gang of five men. He left his trade a good many years ago to cash in on the television boom, setting up a small business installing aerials. Working very long hours he made enough money to buy a block of land and starting building a house. He eventually gave that job up because it kept him away from the family too much, and went back to work for wages. Rae, Delia’s mother, also has a paid job. She is clerk, typist and office dogsbody for a small business selling motor parts. As a young woman in the late 1950s she started clerical work in a bank but was dismissed, as a matter of bank routine, when she married. She took other jobs and kept up paid work even when the children came along, in order to finance the house. Her current job is (theoretically) part time. She does the family’s cooking and cleaning, washing, ironing and most of the childcare.

While there is a strong element of ‘tradition’ in this arrangement, it is also economically rational for the Princes to organize their employment this way. The base rate of pay in Fred’s occupation is $10 a week more than in Rae’s, and actual earnings differ much more than that because of overtime and various penalty rates. Equally important in a recession, Fred’s job is much more secure. He is a member of a strong, though not exceptionally militant, trade union, run by men with experience much like his own, which has

established virtually lifetime tenure for jobs at his level. Rae is covered by a union also run by men (though about two-thirds of its members are women). As it happens, this is a union dominated by conservative Catholic men who are not very keen about women being permanent members of the work-force at all. It has not established any rights of tenure or redundancy entitlements in jobs like hers.

When I first arrived at their house to arrange the interviews, Fred came to meet me with his hands covered with oil. He had been stripping down his lawnmower which had broken down because he was trying to mow wet grass in time for a christening party. Rae was inside the house cooking for the party. As this illustrates, Delia is growing up among clear-cut definitions of what is men's work and what is women's, at home as in the workplace. The sense of what work is appropriate for a woman feeds into Delia's ideas of possible futures. This is evident in her sex-typed interest in animals, and her idea of an alternative as a bank clerk, which is modelled directly on her mother's work history.

Despite a formal commitment to 'equal opportunity', her schooling does little in practice to change these ideas about work and the assumptions about marriage to which they are closely tied. Most of Delia's female friends and peers expect to get married fairly young and have children quite soon. So does she; she can even name the age – twenty – at which she expects to get married. There are some feminist teachers at her school who have different notions of what women might aim for. But as their ideas centre on 'careers' for women and advancement through higher education, they only make much sense to the girls in the 'A' stream – who are the only ones, in a working-class school, likely to have any chance of going to college or university. Delia is not one of them.

Yet Delia's future is not being constructed in a closed system. There are changes going on, even in small details.

Her mother Rae, for instance, has taught Delia's brother, as well as the two girls, to cook. On larger issues there is significant tension, even contradiction. Rae herself had done well at school and was obliged to leave before she wanted to, to help her widowed mother. She had wanted to become a nurse but her boyfriend (Fred) did not like the idea, so she gave it up. Her mild comment, 'it's my only regret now', is the nearest she gets in the interview to expressing anger against Fred.

Even more striking is the fact that Rae kept a job when the children were young. This was for a 'good' reason, to pay for the house, but still violated an almost universal Australian doctrine that mothers should stay home with their pre-school children – a doctrine duly recited and endorsed by Delia. Rae was defensive and 'guilty' (her word) about this and has probably come in for a lot of criticism from relatives. She seems to have tried to compensate by being the perfect wife-and-mother ever since. One result is overload, doing a full-time job at home and a nearly full-time job at work. At thirty-eight she already looks worn and her manner is a little stressed and abrupt. Even Delia, with perception unusual in a fifteen year old, thinks that the job is good for Rae but that she is working too hard.

Both Rae and Fred have a clear idea of what a good family is. Both have sacrificed something in their own lives to make it possible and both have invested a lot of emotion and energy in trying to produce it. Delia, the youngest child, is now the focus of that process. Where Rae's mother had never spoken of sex, Rae and Fred have organized 'round-table sex talks' with their children. They have tried to be more humane than their own parents without losing control of the kids. They closely monitor what is going on in the teenage peer groups. Fred heard rumours of 'sex, drugs, playing up in toilets' at the school, so he went and

challenged the teachers about it, to be reassured that Delia and her sister were not involved. Earlier this year Rae leant that Delia was in a group that smoked and got drunk at weekends; she exerted herself, successfully, to separate Delia from them. Yet Fred and Rae are not opposed to Delia having an active social life. The boyfriend is not only approved of, but, astonishingly, he seems to have been chosen by the parents. At least they introduced him to Delia.

Behind this constant management of the children is a structure of authority that makes Fred, very definitely, the ‘head of the household’ and Rae the second-in-command. He is self-confident in public, she is not. He contrasts his own behaviour with that of his father, ‘a hard man’ (read: violent) who would belt even an eighteen year old for bad manners at table. Fred reports with some complacency that he has thrashed each of his children once, hard, and never needed to again. Now he is able to control them by ‘applied psychology’. We did not ask if Rae was included in the thrashings. (Statistics on domestic violence suggest that at least a quarter of all wives have been assaulted by their husbands at some time.) Fred puts a lot of energy into coaching local junior football teams and is president of their club; Rae is the treasurer. He takes, as a right, a couple of nights out for beers with the boys each week. Rae, even if she felt it the thing to do, does not have the time.

Clearly this is only the beginning of an analysis of Delia’s circumstances. It is perhaps enough to show that what lies behind her relationship with school and intentions about leaving, the original question in our research, is a very complex interplay of personal and social forces. Much of this has to do with her family’s class situation, as educational sociology has long insisted. But as much has to do with the fact that she is a young woman, growing up in a setting

where relations between women and men work in a particular way.

We cannot understand Delia's life without having a way of understanding the division of labour between women and men in her household, in other families she encounters, in Rae's and Fred's workplaces and in the school. We need to understand the power relations between husbands and wives, between men and women in trade unions and companies and in voluntary organizations like the football club. We need to understand how Rae's femininity and Fred's masculinity are constructed, how Delia's sexual awakening is being managed, how images of femininity are conveyed to her. We cannot understand Delia without having some grasp of the tensions and contradictions in these processes and the ways they change between generations.

These are not independent issues. They interact; indeed they define a sphere of social life that is strongly patterned. As soon as this is recognized, it is obvious that the pattern is not peculiar to Delia, Rae and Fred. What happens in their milieu is part of a much wider set of social processes, which must be analyzed to understand what is happening in Delia's life. Let us turn, therefore, to evidence about these patterns on the larger scale.

The Public World: Wages, Education, Jobs

The division of labour in Delia's household and the kinds of jobs her mother and father hold outside, have roots in the conventional images of man-as-breadwinner and woman-as-home-maker. They also have a hard material base. We do not have Fred and Rae Prince's tax returns but the general position is known. In 1978, the year of these interviews, the average wages for adult full-time employees in Australia were $239 a week if they were men, $183 if they were

women. That is to say, a decade after the Equal Pay Case that established a notional policy of sex equality in pay rates, women got 77 per cent of what men got. By 1985 this had moved up to 82 per cent.

These figures greatly overstate the general level of equality. In the mid-1980s more women than men earn less than a full wage because they are less than full-time workers. About 36 per cent of employed women in Australia are part-timers (Rae Prince being one), compared with 6 per cent of employed men. Taking all employed people, women's average earnings are 66 per cent of men's (1985 figures). Further, a higher proportion of women workers earn no wage because they are are unemployed, and many more women than men have very low incomes because they are dependent on a pension or welfare benefit. Figures for 1981/2 show that 1.97 million women have social security as their main source of income compared with 0.78 million men. The result is that the average income of women who have any income at all is 48 per cent of the men's average (1981/2). And even that overstates the degree of equality, since a higher proportion of women have no income at all. Adjusting for that, the average income of all women is 45 per cent of the average income of all men.

Statistics on wealth are harder to come by, as wealth is better concealed. But there is no doubt at all that men control the major concentrations of wealth in the Australian economy. The magazine *Business Review Weekly* compiles, from a miscellany of sources, an annual list of the 200 richest people in the country. In the 1985 list just four of the listed names were women.

Australia has a reputation for putting women down; are these figures exceptional? There are no systematic statistics on men's and women's incomes on a world scale. But there are many pointers to the state of affairs in individual countries. A recent International Labor Office study of

manufacturing industries in twenty countries, for instance, shows that women's wages are less than men's wages in every country studied. As examples:

	Women's wages as % of men's
West Germany	73
Japan	43
Egypt	63
El Salvador	81

Figures for Eastern European economies show much the same pattern as in Western Europe:

	Women's median fulltime earnings as % of men's
Czechoslovakia	67
Poland	67
Hungary	73

A comparison of Latin American countries uses a different measure, setting cut-off points and showing what percentages of women and men fall above and below them. These figures show the percentages falling in the *lowest* income category in each country:

	Women	*Men*
Colombia (all employees)	47%	38%
Chile (non-agricultural)	27%	7%
Panama (non-agricultural)	34%	6%

Clearly the pattern of unequal income is international, though the level of inequality varies from place to place.

One of the reasons for these differentials (though certainly not the only one) is unequal access to education and training. There are relatively systematic international statistics on literacy and participation in schooling. Though the overall levels of literacy claimed have to be taken with a certain scepticism, there is no reason to doubt the overall pattern of sex differences that emerge within each country.

To get a global picture in these and following comparisons, I have taken countries from six broad groupings: (1) United States (a group in itself); (2) EEC + Japan; (3) Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; (4) China + India; (5) second-tier capitalist; (6) poorest.

Access to jobs outside subsistence agriculture – as well as other sources of social power – is very much affected by whether you have been taught to read and write. Almost everywhere in the world, more men than women have been. Table 1 shows a selection of illiteracy rates, the percentage of the population reported illiterate.

Access to higher-level jobs is very much affected by advanced education. Men generally get more of this than women. The figures in table 2 are percentages of the adult population who have post-secondary education.

The differences in earnings shown on page 7 are compounded by massive differences in the numbers of women and men able to earn any income at all. There are systematic figures on this, because of the close interest taken in the size and composition of the ‘labour force’ by official agencies concerned with economic development. The World Bank, for instance, has statistics on what percentage women make of the (paid) labour force in every country, and has even totalled them across four groups of countries (the categories neatly reflecting the Bank’s own preoccupations). The figures are: for ‘developing countries’,

25 per cent; for ‘capital-surplus oil-exporting countries’, 5 per cent; for ‘industrialized countries’, 35 per cent; for ‘centrally planned economies’, 45 per cent. Examples of women’s share of the total labour force in countries selected from the six groupings defined earlier, are shown in table 3.

Table 1 Percentage of population reported illiterate

Country	***Women (%)***	***Men (%)***
(1) United States	Not given	
(2) Italy	7	5
(3) Poland	2	1
(4) India	81	52
(5) Brazil	26	22
(6) Indonesia	42	23

Table 2 Percentage of adult population with post-secondary education

Country	***Women (%)***	***Men (%)***
(1) United States	28	37
(2) Japan	10	19
(3) Poland	4	7
(4) India	0.3	2
(5) Brazil	3	5
(6) Egypt	1	5

Table 3 Women’s share of the total paid labour force

Country	***Percentage share***
(1) United States	38