

HENRIETTA MOORE, 1994  
A PASSION FOR DIFFERENCE  
ESSAYS ON ANTHROPOLOGY & GENDER

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THE DIVISIONS WITHIN: SEX,  
GENDER AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

*This essay was originally presented as a paper, and since much of what it discusses turns on problems of position, location, self-representation and representativity, I have decided to leave it, as far as is possible, in its original form. Extensive use of the first-person pronoun is frowned on in the contexts in which I am used to working, but I have deliberately retained it in this text to try to convey a sense of particularity, of myself speaking in a specific context(s). The use of 'we' is a highly politicized act both in anthropology and in feminist contexts. Its use here is intended to convey a sense of audience, that is, of myself speaking to others. But, and much more importantly, it also operates as a mark of interrogation, a fictive unity that reveals the lines of fragmentation at the very moment when it claims affinity.<sup>1</sup>*

The original impetus for this paper was a question concerning the way in which feminism had influenced or affected my own work. This perfectly reasonable request engendered in me a feeling of intense panic. My first thought was 'Oh God, how has feminism influenced my work?' The root of the anxiety, of course, is one about being found out, being exposed as 'not the real thing', 'not a proper feminist'. The anxiety of failure and lack is not entirely confined to feminists. In fact, it is probably rather a common paranoia among academics. However, what this anxiety raises for me as a feminist is the question of positionality. Feminist politics and feminist practice have always required a clear sense of position and of the politics of

location. For one thing, there has been the necessity of speaking out, declaring one's feminist politics within the workplace or the home or the political party or wherever. In addition, the powerful, sometimes acrimonious debates within the feminist community itself have demanded that one own up as to where one locates oneself in terms of a variety of carefully drawn and demarcated internal divisions: radical feminist or socialist feminist, for example? These divisions are important because they have guided the political programmes proposed by different groups of feminists, and because they bring already politicized identities into play. They raise, therefore, what I am going to call, after Nancy Miller (1991: 20), the problem of representativity. Who and what do we represent when we speak out, and how do we negotiate the inevitable problem in the social sciences of having to speak about people whilst trying not to speak for them? The question of who speaks for whom and on what basis has given rise in feminist debate to a number of very significant divisions, one of which is the split between theory and practice. The main issue here is how to link theoretical work with political activism. Those who have not seen themselves as theorists have demanded to know what purpose theory serves for them and how readily, if at all, theory takes account of their experiences, concerns and struggles. Feminist theory has seemed to many not only arcane, but elitist, racist and/or patriarchal.

Thus, the politics of location make two things abundantly clear. First, that there is no single, homogenous body of feminist theory; and secondly, that the divisions between different groups of women, as well as between practising feminists, make it impossible to assert a commonality based on shared membership in a universal category 'woman'. Such divisions have a particular resonance for me because I work as a social anthropologist. As it happens, I work with and across divisions of race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and religion. I question the purpose of my work, especially my theoretical writing, for the people I work with because I do not find it easy to know of what immediate use it could be to them. I frequently try to deal with this problem, at least in part, by grounding my theoretical thinking in the details of daily life and in the realities of post-colonial political economies. I do not succeed in this as often as I should like, and I tenaciously hold on to what I try to convince myself is an acceptable political position by giving as much space and time to working on issues of agricultural change, women's

labour and nutrition as I do to writing on theoretical questions. The gross imbalances of power involved in my research situation mean that at every turn the very fact of writing and talking about other people's lives can never be clearly separated from the question of whether or not one is speaking for them. This is a perennial problem for all feminist social scientists, in spite of a commitment to feminist methodologies and participatory research. Many of my feminist colleagues are very critical of my involvement in anthropology, often projecting on to me their own anxieties about how to deal with issues of race and class, and about how to manage the increasing gap between feminist activism and the academy. I inevitably do the same to them. The most significant impact that feminism has had on my work has been to create a space in which I must continually engage with these issues of positionality and representativity. I want to take up a very small part of this theme in this essay and discuss the way in which theoretical treatments of sex, gender and sexual difference are connected to what it is that unites and what it is that divides us as women and as feminists.

The assertion of the non-universal status of the category 'woman' is by now almost a commonplace. Anthropology has had a particular historical role in the development of feminist theory because of its contribution to the critical reworking of the category 'woman'. In the 1970s feminists outside anthropology drew readily on the cross-cultural data provided by anthropological research to establish variability in gender and gender roles, and thus provide substantive content for the feminist position that gender was socially constructed and not biologically determined. However, cross-cultural variability in the social construction of gender could not and did not account for women's universal subordination, and in order to remedy this, anthropology developed two very important comparative theories.

The first asserted that women everywhere were associated with nature, partly as a result of their reproductive functions, while men were associated with culture. It was suggested that the devaluing of nature in relation to culture accounted for the hierarchical relations between women and men (see Ortner, 1974). The second theory emphasized that women were inferior to men because they were linked to the domestic sphere, once again in consequence of their role in reproduction and child care, whilst men were associated with the public sphere of social life (see Rosaldo, 1974). These com-

parative theories of women's subordination were not long-lived. The categories of nature, culture, public and private were themselves found to be historically and culturally variable, and the homologies posited between these categories and the categories of gender difference were revealed to be far from universal (see Moore, 1988: 13-30; McCormack and Strathern, 1980; Strathern, 1984; and Rosaldo, 1980). What is important about these two comparative theories of women's subordination is that they attempted to provide socially, as opposed to biologically, based accounts of women's position in society and of the origins of gender difference. The preconditions for this project were, of course, that the biological and the social had already been separated from each other as explanations for the origins of gender difference. Whatever role biology was playing, it was not determining gender.

The very fact that these comparative theories were social rather than biological in their determinations opened them to critical reinterpretation by feminists of colour, feminists from the developing world and lesbian feminists. They challenged the notion of the universal category 'woman' and the assumption of underlying commonalities of existence for all women. Trans-cultural and trans-historical patterns of female subordination were rejected, and theoretical concepts were reformulated.<sup>2</sup> In the social sciences, at least, this produced a crisis both about the political purpose and organization of a feminist politics which did not appear to have a coherent constituency and about the status of analytical models of gender. In general, it would probably be fair to say that many responded to the latter crisis by asserting the necessity for culturally and historically specific analyses. We could look for commonalities between well-specified situations, but we would never be able to state in advance what the consequences of the intersections of race, class and gender, for example, would be. What is interesting about this crisis is that it generated a simultaneous move towards pluralism and specificity. An enormous range of empirical outcomes and theoretical positions were produced as a result of having to reduce the scope of any model or analytical statement to a particular situation. We now recognize this development as part of a general critique of universalizing theories, metanarratives and totalizing typologies. The current debate is, of course, one about whether we locate the origins of this movement in post-structuralism and deconstructionism or in feminism.

with fixed categorical differences, is the effect of a specific discourse. What is more, if binary sex is an effect of discourse, then it cannot be considered as a unitary essentialism and, more importantly, it cannot be recognized as invariant or natural. This is, in essence, the argument Thomas Laqueur makes so elegantly in his recent book (1990) and two quite radical positions follow from this point.

First, in terms of anthropological discourse the distinction between sex and gender on which feminist anthropology has rested its case falls away. As Judith Butler (1990) points out in her reading of the above passage from Foucault, perhaps there is no distinction to be made between sex and gender after all. The second point, which follows from the first, is that, as Yanagisako and Collier (1987) assert, we cannot necessarily assume that binary biological sex everywhere provides the universal basis for the cultural categories 'male' and 'female'. If gender constructs are culturally variable, then so are the categories of sexual difference. This is not the first time in anthropology or anywhere else that the fixed binary categories of sex have been interrogated; one only needs to point to the research that exists on 'the third sex', hermaphroditism and androgyny.<sup>3</sup> But recent work in anthropology has a rather different purpose.

We know that the recognition of anatomical differences between women and men does not necessarily produce a discrete, fixed, binary categorization of sex in the manner of western discourse. Ethnographic material suggests that the differences between women and men which people in other cultures naturalize and locate in the human body and in features of the physical and cosmological environment are not necessarily those which correspond to the constellation of features on which western discourse bases its categorizations. For example, the social differences between women and men may be located in the body as natural differences, as in situations described by anthropologists working in Nepal, where the differences between the female and the male are conceived of as the difference between flesh and bone.<sup>4</sup> However, these differences of gender are said to be located in all bodies, thus collapsing the distinction between sexed bodies and socially constructed genders usually maintained in anthropological discourse. The female and the male, as flesh and bone, are necessary features of bodily identity. This produces a discursive space where theories of social (gender) difference are grounded in the physiology of

However, as regards feminist theory in the social sciences, the shift in methods of gender analysis towards a specificity which would account for a plurality of experiences and contexts was not as radical as it seemed. One fixed position remained and that was the division between sex and gender. Gender was seen as socially constructed, but underlying that idea was a notion that although gender was not determined by biology, it *was* the social elaboration in specific contexts of the obvious facts of biological sex difference. It did not matter that almost everyone recognized that both biology and culture were historically and culturally variable concepts, as were the relations between them. The problem was that the elaboration of the social determinations and entailments of gender in all their specificity had effectively left the relationship between sex and gender very under-theorized.

Recent work in anthropology has returned to this question of the relationship between sex and gender. Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier (1987) have suggested that the radical separation of sex and gender characteristic of feminist anthropology is a specific and rather pervasive ethnocentrism. They argue that it is part of a western folk model which dominates anthropological theorizing and, like so many of the other binary categorizations in anthropology – nature/culture, public/private – it does not stand up to cross-cultural examination. In many ways this simply marks the impact of neo-Foucauldian thinking in anthropology. It is worth recalling here Foucault's argument in *The History of Sexuality* (vol. I) that 'sex' is an effect rather than an origin and that, far from being a given and essential unity, it is, as a category, the product of specific discursive practices:

the notion of 'sex' made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle, an omnipresent meaning; sex was thus able to function as a unique signifier and as a universal signified. (1978: 154)

Foucault's basic argument is that the notion of 'sex' does not exist prior to its determination within a discourse in which its constellations of meanings are specified, and that therefore bodies have no 'sex' outside discourses in which they are designated as sexed. Consequently, the construction of fixed binary sexes,

the body, and thus function as part of the biological facts of sex difference.

This is, of course, very close to Foucault's own project, which is concerned with how it is that sexual differences and the category of sex are constructed within discourse as necessary features of bodily identity. In western discourse, it appears, it is not just that we need to have a body in order to have a sex, but that we need a sex so as to have a body. This rather strange way of thinking, of modelling the relationship between bodies and the categories of sexual difference, is precisely that which is most readily undermined by ethnographic material. Many of the differences which concern people around the world are internal to bodies, that is, within them rather than between them. The question is, are we to speak of these differences as differences of sex or of gender? This point is difficult to grasp for many of us because we have the gravest difficulty in understanding categories of sex and notions of sexual difference which do not correspond neatly to discrete physical bodies already designated as sexually differentiated. Sex, then, as far as we understand it within the terms of western discourse, is something which differentiates between bodies, while gender is the set of variable social constructions placed upon those differentiated bodies. It is precisely this formula which obscures rather than illuminates when it comes to the cross-cultural analysis of sex, sexual difference and gender. In many instances, as I have already suggested, gender differences are internal to all bodies and are part of the process through which bodies are sexed. In such situations it is far from apparent how we should distinguish sex from gender, and, even more problematic, it is unclear exactly what gender as a concept or a category refers to. This argument is quite different from those which have been made about the 'third sex', hermaphroditism and androgyny.

The instability - potential instability - of the category 'gender' in cross-cultural analysis is an alarming prospect. When we talk in general terms about discourses on gender and on the relationship between sex and gender, even if by this we only really mean to say different ideas about sex and gender, we still have to ask ourselves, whose discourses are we referring to? At one time anthropology subscribed to the view that each culture had its own model of gender, its own definitions of the categories female and male. This view, which was much reinforced by a predominantly

Durkheimian view of culture and by the kind of liberal cultural relativism still prevalent in the discipline, has changed in recent years as anthropologists have moved towards working with models of culture which stress conflict and indeterminacy, and as they concentrate more on the differences within cultures as opposed to simply between them.<sup>5</sup> However, it does not solve the problem of how to link what we might call dominant cultural models of gender to the specific experiences and situations of particular groups or individuals within that social context. This is not, of course, a problem which is confined to anthropology, but it raises once again the problems of positionality and representativity.

One set of difficulties here is about how the experiences of race, sexuality and class, as well as other forms of salient difference, transform the experience of gender. But there are additional problems about how we are to conceptualize and analyse the overdetermined relationships between dominant and sub-dominant discourses on gender, the body, sexuality and sexual difference. These questions become particularly acute when we acknowledge that they are crucial not only in and for our work, but in and for our lives. What relationships do feminist understandings of gender have to dominant gender models and ideologies; can the former ever be entirely free of the latter; is this what we are striving for? This is a matter of subjectivity and self-identity, as well as a matter of politics. When we are busy discussing other people's discourses on gender, their views about the body, their gender identities and subjectivities, how easy do we find it to produce the kind of analysis which we would like to see applied to ourselves?

As Adrienne Rich remarked:

Perhaps we need a moratorium on saying 'the body'. For it's also possible to abstract 'the body'. When I write 'the body', I see nothing in particular. To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity... To say 'the body' lifts me away from what has given me primary perspective. To say 'my body' reduces the temptation to grandiose assertions. (1986: 215)

By 'grandiose assertions' Rich means presumably universalizing, comparative theories. As a lesbian feminist, Rich is only too well aware that the dominant discourses on gender, the body and sexuality prevalent in her own cultural setting do not fit her personal

understanding of these categories and/or processes very closely. Lesbians, like many other groups, have evolved their own discourses, what some have termed sub-dominant or alternative discourses, on these issues. It is on this basis that writers talk of different kinds of experience – 'the lesbian experience' or 'the black experience', for example – and seek in terms of feminist theory to establish the grounds for theoretical approaches based on positionality and representativity. However, the problem is not just how to recognize the existence of specific groups who may have alternative perspectives and may not subscribe to dominant discourses within any particular setting. The more pressing problem with regard to gender, the body and sexual difference is to work out what bearing social and cultural discourses have on individual experience.

This is, of course, simply a modern version of an old problem in sociology and anthropology about the relationship between the individual and society. In anthropology this problem has often been run in terms of the relationship between dominant cultural symbols and the individual's understanding and interpretation of them. This is a key issue in feminist theory, where feminist standpoint theory invites us to take women's experiences as a starting point for analysis (see, for example, Harding, 1987, and chapter 4 of this volume). Standpoint theory assumes that women have a different perspective from men, and that different groups of women will also differ in their standpoints. In this sense it privileges groups over individuals, but a more radical reading of its premises would suggest that we all of us have different experiences and understandings of cultural discourses, symbols and institutions. The question is how much any of us share with each other.

The specific and the universal, the particular and the comparative – how are these two polarities to be brought into conjunction with each other? I have always been a supporter of the specific and the particular over the universal and the comparative, and I have always assumed that this is the result of my experience of research in Africa. However, I was listening to Catherine MacKinnon lecturing recently on women and human rights.<sup>6</sup> MacKinnon holds to a radical feminist version of standpoint theory; in her work she constantly emphasizes what it is that women, in the global sense, share, and her work has been extensively criticized on precisely this point. She was talking about the mass rape and enforced impregnation of

women in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. She argued simply that these crimes have been and continue to be practised on women in many different times and places, and without erasing or ignoring the specifics of what is going on in the former Yugoslavia, it is important to recognize that women suffer these crimes at the hands of men and they do so because they are women. Women are in fact *universal* in their *particularity*. It was very hard at that moment to deny the force of her argument, or even to think of any compelling reason why I should ever have disagreed with it. Women do fear sexual violence. If we want some empirical justification for such a universalizing assertion, it is only a matter of looking at the various women's grassroots organizations around the world and at what they are campaigning against.

Rosi Braidotti, starting from very different assumptions, makes an argument which has strong parallels with MacKinnon's. She speaks of a vision of women as a *collective singularity*, where this notion is intended to provide a provisional platform for the support of 'women's real and multiple struggles' (1991: 132). But when we examine her argument and consider what she finds her collective singularity on, we find the connections with MacKinnon's argument quite evident. For example, at one point she says: 'It is on the basis of their shared experience as bio-culturally female beings that women have started to speak in their own voice, distancing it from masculine experience' (1991: 139). Bodies. It all has something to do with bodies.

Is it really the case that our similarities are grounded in our bodies? This is an example of a moment when the personal comes into lived relation with the theoretical. I find that my antipathy even to simply posing this question is so great that I have to remind myself not to grind my teeth. And yet, I know that the recent return to the body in feminist theory and the efforts on the part of many researchers to reclaim the female body and the feminine – partly as a protest against the disembodied nature of the social constructionist discourse on the body – seems to many to offer real hope and potential. This return to the body is not a straightforward one, because some researchers want to distinguish between different types of female body. Some do not want to reduce the female body to its sexual and reproductive functions and they want to be able to mark a female body which is not the maternal body. For others, the primary connection is between mothers and daughters,

or mothers and children, and they would like to be able to celebrate the maternal in the female body.<sup>7</sup>

French feminists associated with the school of *l'écriture féminine* have been accused of biological essentialism, though their work has recently been re-evaluated on this point (Brennan, 1989; Schor, 1989). Rosi Braidotti, in particular, argues that this charge of essentialism is false and that the feminine libidinal economy discussed in this work has taken on board the fundamental epistemological insight of post-structuralism and psychoanalysis which is that the body is a 'cultural artefact' (1991: 219, 243). Braidotti suggests that what is hopeful about a return to the female body is that it signals a recognition of the embodied nature of subjectivity. However, there is a distinction to be made here between her argument and a straightforward neo-Foucauldian or social constructionist one, because she eschews any attempt to sever the body from the biological and claim that it is just a social construction or a social field; nothing other than an effect of discourse (1991: 131, 243). This point is worth making because it is the case that a radical social constructionist position, such as that espoused by Judith Butler (1990) in her recent book, does risk positing the body as a blank surface on which the social becomes inscribed, thus suggesting in some sense that the body is pre-social.<sup>8</sup>

Braidotti argues that what is truly revolutionary about a return to the female body is the notion of speaking from the body, with all that this implies both about the specificity of positionality and the embodied, material nature of one's relation with the world. Much of her inspiration seems to come from a reading of Adrienne Rich against the writings of the *écriture féminine* school, and it is from the former that she derives her term 'feminine corpor(e)ality'. Rich writes in *Of Woman Born* (1976: 39-40):

In order to live a fully human life we require not only control of our bodies...; we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence.

Rich takes the woman-to-woman bond as the grounds for subjectivity and for social relations. Braidotti tries to take the argument about feminine corpor(e)ality a stage further, and she stresses a notion of the body as an interface, a threshold between the material

and the symbolic. The body is, therefore, not an essence nor indeed a form of anatomical destiny, but rather it is 'one's primary location in the world, one's primary situation in reality' (Braidotti, 1991: 219).

Thus, speaking from the body would be a way of acknowledging women's position in the world, their difference from men, their particularity. It would also be a way of stressing simultaneously women's material and symbolic relation to their world. Such a view of the body could in principle, though Braidotti does not elaborate on this point, deal both with the politics of reproduction and sexual violence and with the symbolic construction of sexual difference, including the discursive overdetermination of the category 'woman'. Braidotti is sensitive to the charges of exclusion and unwarranted universalism that could be levelled at this theory, but by stressing the materiality and specificity of the body as a location for subjectivity she hopes to take account of the differences between women, whilst allowing for what MacKinnon would term their *universal particularity*.

There are some interesting parallels here with more recent work in biology. The radical separation of biology and culture is something many biologists would no longer hold to. A more contemporary view of human biology would stress that biology enables culture, while culture brings about biological change. In what now sound like rather old-fashioned terms we could say that biology and culture are in a dialectical relationship. In this version of biology the body is indeed an interface, a threshold, a mediator. Perhaps we are arriving at a situation where the metaphors of the biological and the social sciences are going to come into some kind of conjunction or relation with each other.

Overall, we might argue that the view of the body espoused by Rosi Braidotti has considerable potential. In particular, its welding of French and North American feminist theory allows it to occupy a rather creative discursive space. But this notion of the body does still provide difficulties and these arise predominantly, I suggest, because of the influence of psychoanalytic thought on the scholars on whom Braidotti draws. The crux of the issue is what is the ontological status of the body, and beyond that what is the ontological status of sexual difference? In order to proceed much further with this discussion, we have to recognize the degree to which we as feminists have a tendency to talk past each other once we begin to speak of sex, gender and sexual difference. One starting point is



to note that sexual difference for French feminist scholars is not sex and it is not gender.<sup>9</sup> It is, I think, a rather intermediate term. This is because much of their work draws on psychoanalytic thought and starts with the premise that one must acquire a sexed identity. But however one might theorize the stages involved in that acquisition, it is not the same thing as anatomical sex, nor is it the same thing as acquiring a gender.

Braidotti's return to the female body reinscribes binary sexual difference, and makes the inevitability of a mutually exclusive categorization, the basis for women's engagement with the world. In this sense it does not matter that she can deal with the charge of universalism by providing the space for an embodied subjectivity that can be historically and culturally specific, because what she cannot do is to abandon the ordinary nature of the sexual difference which grounds her theory of the body. The question is, does this matter? Perhaps there is a case for asserting the primacy of sexual difference if we want to describe women in their *particularity*, and especially if we want to treat issues of domination and power.

However, as many others have pointed out, there are very serious difficulties with asserting a primary, ontological status for sexual difference: principally, the exclusion of other forms of difference, notably race and class; and the reinscription of the binary categorization of sexual difference which makes the feminine the male 'other' and institutes a relation of hierarchy. Theories which posit the primacy of sexual difference are in fact vulnerable to criticism because in order for the assertion of primacy to be convincing, they have to be abstract and decontextualized. At the first moment that the question 'Whose sexed identity?' is asked, it becomes apparent that the reality of such a lived identity is that it cannot be experienced in a pure form.

When has gender ever been pure, untainted by other forms of difference, other relations of inequality? Lives are shaped by a multiplicity of differences, differences which may be perceived categorically but are lived relationally. The concepts of sexual difference and gender difference collide at this moment and cannot usefully be separated again, though they never become and cannot become identical. And as for gender discourse, there is no discourse on gender outside the discourses of race and class and ethnicity and sexuality and so on. The point, then, is that although, in theory, we could all live the categorizations of our bodies and our identities in

different ways - as Braidotti implies - we would still have to acknowledge that, in terms of the theory as posited, our bodies would be primarily differentiated in relation to a binary sexual economy which would be prior to all other forms of difference.

Perhaps the problem is not really one about bodies at all, but about identities, or rather about how we conceive of the relationship between the two. This is a problem which has been formulated for at least some of us in a very specific way by psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic theory is, as has been remarked, an historically and culturally specific theory, just like any other. But the processes of identity acquisition which it proposes are intended to have universal application, and the relationships between anatomy, sexuality and identity which it validates are presented as marking the path of non-pathological development. The rigidity of the sexed categories that psychoanalysis provides is open to question. Jacqueline Rose for one has argued that psychoanalytic theory does not work with a notion of fixed and immutable identities, and that it has been one of the few places in western culture where it has been possible to realize that women 'do not slip painlessly into their roles as women, if indeed they do at all' (1983: 9). However, in spite of these more liberal interpretations, which argue that psychoanalysis takes sexual difference as something to be explained rather than assumed, it is still the case that psychoanalytic theory insists that in order to become a member of a social order we must make an identification with either the category 'woman' or the category 'man'. This is the nub of the matter. What does psychoanalytic theory intend when it says that we must identify with one or other of these categories? Is it really proposed that we should take these categories to be discursively produced and therefore variable across space and time? There is much talk about how it should be possible to imagine a signifying economy which does not take the phallus as the primary signifier, but this is seen as a potentiality rather than an actuality. From the point of view of cross-cultural analysis, it can be argued that Lacan's law of the father is ethnocentric and that, since it is an abstract and decontextualized theory of signification and takes no account of any form of difference except that of sex, it is exclusionary in a number of ways.

Lacan has always been credited with cleansing Freud of biologisms, and some of his own ideas about the body and its relation to subjectivity are suggestive. Lacan moves away from

Freud's idea of sexual drives as given in biological development to an analysis of such drives through the functioning of language and linguistic processes. For Lacan, drives are not biologically determined, but rather are constituted in processes of signification. Lacan treats the body in an analogous fashion, suggesting that the body as it is experienced and perceived by the child is fragmentary, a body-in-bits-and-pieces. Out of this biological chaos of sensation and physiological activity will be constructed a lived anatomy, a psychic map of the body which is given not by biology, but by significations and fantasies (both personal and collective) of the body (Grosz, 1990: 43-4). Elizabeth Grosz describes 'this body' in the following way:

Bound up within parental fantasies long before the child is ever born, the child's body is divided along lines of special meaning or significance, independent of biology. The body is lived in accordance with an individual's and a culture's concepts of biology. (1990: 44)

This sounds a little like Foucault with the psychic and the cultural added. Lacan's lived anatomy is an imaginary one, a unity created out of the internalizations of self - other relations. The 'body-image' is an effect of the highly particular meanings that the body has been endowed with by individuals, by cultures and - according to Lacan - by the nuclear family. One cannot accept this proposition about the nuclear family uncritically, but what seems to be implied here is that the body-image or corporeal schema is the result of the internalization of the body-image of others, particularly the primary carer. Overall, what is significant about this body-image is that it is neither natural nor cultural, neither individual nor social; rather it is a threshold term occupying both positions (Grosz, 1990: 46).

There are some resonances here with Braidotti's 'feminine corporeality', though in order to provide a workable theory of embodied subjectivity we would need to combine Braidotti's emphasis on materiality with Lacan's insistence on the symbolic. This might prove extremely difficult, not to say risky, since there is nothing that links Braidotti's female body to Lacan's feminine, except some residual and unresolved problem about anatomy. The problem is that the female and the feminine are not the same thing. At this point the concepts of sex, gender and sexual difference all collide together. The meanings of these terms begin to escape us,

and they do so largely because they are decontextualized. It is only in the context of racial discrimination, religious intolerance, neo-imperial politics and other concrete socio-economic determinations that we know what distinguishes sex from gender, that we understand the economy of sexual difference, that we come to grips with the material referents of the symbolic. The potential for developing a feminist theory of embodied subjectivity which could and would take account of race, class, sexuality and other forms of difference certainly exists. However, it is likely to remain permanently out of reach whilst we insist that sex, gender and sexual difference are foundational in some sense, either as categories or as sets of relations. In so far as the theories of the body I have been discussing rest on post-structuralist assumptions they are clearly anti-foundationalist; though my point is that they are not really so because they work on the assumption that bodies are already divided into two mutually exclusive categories. Binary biological sex provides the basis for the cultural categories 'male' and 'female'. The shifting and unstable nature of the sexed identity proposed by Lacan is always mapped on to and mapped out in terms of a pre-existing categorization of sex. This may not matter, of course, if what we really want to do is to work out some kind of critical practice, that is, a space for critical reflection on and political action around these issues, rather than a new metatheory.

As an anthropologist, it is the pre-existing categorization of sex - that somehow, in the hands of theorists, transmutes itself first into sexual difference and thence into gender - which is the stumbling block. Much new work on the gendering of body parts, bodily substances and social acts makes it clear that there is no one-to-one correspondence between sex, gender and sexual difference understood in the terms of western discourse. As I suggested earlier, individual persons, whilst having recognizable biological features, might not have discrete and singular genders in the sense that feminist discourse has conventionally understood that term. Anna Meigs has argued, on the basis of her research with the Hua people of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, that individuals are classified by external anatomical features, but that they are also classified according to the amount of certain male and female substances they have in their bodies. These substances are thought to be transferable between the genital classes through eating, heterosexual sex and everyday casual contact (Meigs, 1990: 108-9). The



binary categories 'female' and 'male' are thus not discrete ones and nor are they premised on the discrete binary categorization of biological sex differences evidenced by external genitalia.

The Hua insist that the gender of a person changes over their lifetime as their body takes on more of the substances and fluids transferred by the other sex. On the basis of what Meigs says, the Hua would appear to have a pre-existing categorization of sex, since they classify substances as sexed according to the kinds of bodies they originate in. Semen, for example, is a male substance. However, the question is, how well are their theories of sex, gender and sexual difference represented by theoretical models premised on European and North American folk models? Perhaps it does not matter that in order to make alternative gender models intelligible to our students, colleagues and readers we have to rework them in terms which thoroughly misrepresent them. Thereby, I may add, making them appear even more exotic. But there is an additional point, because one of the things revealed by alternative models for thinking and living the connections of sex, gender and sexual difference is that European and North American models are probably not well served by the prevailing theories either. Many people find that their theories of sexual difference and their experience of gendered identities do not correspond well to discrete binary categories. There has been some recognition of this in recent theoretical work on gender, where writers have begun to emphasize the performative aspects of gender identity and the possibilities that exist for the subversion of categorical identities (see, for example, Butler, 1990, and Garber, 1992).

This emphasis on performance is welcome, but it does not seem very revolutionary from an anthropological point of view. This is because ethnographic material suggests that gender categorizations are often based on roles - that is, on what women and men do rather than on anatomy. The North American Berdache is now a rather well-known example of a third gender categorization which counters the one-to-one equivalence of the binary categories of sex and gender; and a man usually becomes a Berdache by assuming the tasks and roles of a woman (W. Williams, 1986; H. Whitehead, 1981; Roscoe, 1988). There is considerable emphasis in the anthropological literature on gender as performed and its relation to the symbolic construction of gender. More recent work stresses that these different aspects of gender are perhaps best seen as mutually

co-existent, but sometimes conflicting models of, or discourses on, gender. Where discourses exist that focus on the absolute and irreducible nature of sexual difference, there is no particular reason to privilege them over other discourses or to accord them some kind of foundational status. What is essential is to examine those contexts in which certain discourses become appropriate and powerful. Marriage ceremonies, for example, are sometimes situations in which sexual difference is stressed; whereas philosophical discussion may produce a very different account, underplaying the role of women and men in biological reproduction and emphasizing their essential similarities, especially through the course of biographical time. Ethnographic accounts often give a very vivid sense of people's perceptions of their 'lived anatomies' and of how understandings of bodies, gender identities and sexual difference are given substance through involvement in repetitive daily tasks and through the concrete nature of social relationships. From this perspective it is hardly surprising that age, class, race, sexuality and religion completely alter the experience of a 'lived anatomy', of what it is that sex, gender and sexual difference signify. What performance is all about, of course, is gender relations.

'Gender relations' is not, however, a term widely used by theorists who derive their inspiration from post-structuralism or from the writings of Lacan. Conversely, we should note that anthropologists rarely use the term 'sexual difference' unless they mean biological sex, and they never use the phrase 'sexual relations' unless they mean sexual intercourse. We can see once again how easy it is for us all to talk past one another. This is particularly the case when we think about performance and gender relations, and the connection of both to a notion of embodied subjectivity.

Lacan explicitly states that the subject divided in language is a subject constituted in language; but by language he does not mean social discourse, he means instead a system of signification, a system of signs. More problematic still is the fact that the Lacanian subject should not be confused either with the person or with the self. The assumption of a sexed subject position is a prerequisite for agency and for self-identity, and as such subjectivity is an attribute of the self, but subjects are not individuals. It is for this reason that Lacanian ideas about the constitution of subjectivity - in spite of the liberating release they provide from Cartesian views of the subject and its role in the production of knowledges - are likely to give us



very little insight into the experience of being a gendered individual. To do that, we would need to link Lacanian ideas about the constitution of subjectivity to social discourses and discursive practices. This is precisely what a number of feminists have tried to do, most notably perhaps Teresa de Lauretis (1986). The issue here, of course, is that the sexed subject and the gendered individual are not one and the same. There is a gap and it is this gap which the notions of embodied subjectivity and copor(e)al femininity are designed to fill.

De Lauretis tries to bridge the same gap by stressing notions of intersubjectivity and relationality. She makes use of the insights of Lacanian theory, but her concern is with an 'I' understood as a complicated field of competing subjectivities and competing identities. This 'I' is most certainly a concrete individual and one who is engaged in relations with others (1986). Such a view of subjectivity does not privilege gender over all other forms of difference, but because of its stress on intersubjectivity and on social relations it is perfectly compatible with a notion of embodied subjectivity, as well as with ideas about performance. De Lauretis argues convincingly that differences between women may be better understood as differences within women. In other words, that the differences of race, class, sexuality and so on are constitutive of gender identity. As De Lauretis says:

the female subject is a site of differences; differences that are not only sexual or only racial, economic, or (sub)cultural, but all of these together and often enough at odds with one another... once it is understood... that these differences not only constitute each woman's consciousness and subjective limits but all together define the female subject of feminism in its very specificity... these differences... cannot be again collapsed into a fixed identity, a sameness of all women as Woman, or a representation of Feminism as a coherent and available image. (1986: 14-15)

Difference is, of course, a relational concept, and it is always experienced relationally in terms of political discrimination, inequalities of power and forms of domination. There is, therefore, nothing useful to be said about gender outside the concrete specificity of gender relations. This very specificity guarantees that gender itself does not exist outside its material and symbolic inter-

sections with other forms of difference. In fact, I would suggest for the time being that we might be better off working back towards sex, gender, sexual difference and the body rather than taking them as a set of starting points. If our *universal particularity* is to be significant, and if we are to achieve anything as a *collective singularity*, then we might best strive towards an understanding of embodied subjectivity which does not privilege gender and sexual difference unduly just because we are so uncertain about what else it is, if anything, that we share.

ences. Lacan is able to maintain this position because although his theory is a theory of the social constitution of the subject, it is not a theory which takes account of social institutions, social practices, local power relations and social discourses. The Lacanian subject is an abstracted, if not actually an abstract, subject, and should not be confused either with the person or with the self (P. Smith, 1988: ch. 5). The assumption of a sexed subject position for Lacan is a prerequisite for agency and for self-identity, but it is not a description of the individual or self, and subjectivity is best understood as an attribute of the self. It is for this reason that Lacanian theory ultimately gives us very little insight into the experience of being a gendered individual in any culture. To understand that experience, it would be necessary to link Lacanian ideas about the constitution of subjectivity to social discourses and discursive practices. This involves linking the assumption of a sexed subject position to all the potential sexed subject positions which are available in social life and social practice. It matters, therefore, that people have local views of the person, of the sort of people women and men are meant to be, of the nature of the biological make-up of the physical being, of the relations between the human and non-human worlds and many other local theories, and are able to use these ideas to reflect on the nature of their experience and on the kind of person/self they believe themselves to be. The assumption of a sexed subject position only makes sense in the context of social discourses and discursive practices; without this context there would be no potential or necessity for any sort of subject, precarious or otherwise.

Recent feminist theory has sought to make use of Lacanian ideas in precisely this way, and to utilize the concept of the non-essentialist subject constituted in language to try to come to grips with individuals' experiences of being a gendered subject (Fuss, 1989: ch. 2). The important point here is to examine how we are all subject to discourse and to the various subject positions which are opened up to us in discourse. Such subject positions can be resisted, both consciously and unconsciously, but it is in terms of these positions, even if in contradiction to them, that we construct a sense of ourselves as selves, as individuals and as persons.

### 3

## FANTASIES OF POWER AND FANTASIES OF IDENTITY: GENDER, RACE AND VIOLENCE

Gender identity is both constructed and lived. A point easy enough to make, but very difficult to develop analytically or to know how to act on politically. The issue is one, of course, about the relationship between structure and praxis, between the individual and the social. Much of contemporary social theory addresses this issue, and notable theorists like Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) have sought to elaborate a theory of agency that would account both for institutionalization and for social change. Pierre Bourdieu's writing (1977, 1990c) works over the same theme, but from a different perspective (see chapter 5). With gender and with race, and with all of that we might term the structuring principles of human social life, the problem of how individuals lead collective lives emerges and re-emerges as one of the most urgent problematics for contemporary social science. Since the 1960s radical reformulations of the notions of the social and the cultural have provided the impetus for a rethinking of the place of the individual and/or subject within structures of power and domination.<sup>1</sup> One important theme has been that of resistance and another, by implication but less often referred to directly, that of complicity. As types of agency, resistance and complicity are notoriously difficult to analyse. What makes individuals resist or comply? It has become increasingly clear that one cannot answer such a question in purely social terms. Issues of desire, identification, fantasy and fear all have to be addressed. Each individual has a personal history and it is in the

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intersection of this history with collective situations, discourses and identities that the problematic relationship between structure and praxis, and between the social and the individual, resides. Thus, resistance and complicity are not only types of agency, they are also forms or aspects of subjectivity; and as types of agency and as forms of subjectivity they are marked through with structures of difference based on gender, race, ethnicity and so on. There is no comprehensive list of such differences. From an analytical and a political point of view they must be specified in context rather than assumed in advance. At one moment the racial may take priority over the sexual, and in another ethnicity may act as the defining difference. What is clear is that these forms of difference are mutually imbricated, and that although we might talk about priorities or determinations between sets of differences, we should be aware that they can never be truly separate from each other. However, I take as my starting point in this essay the issue of an established link between gender difference and types of agency. My concern is with the relationship between gender identity and gender discourses, between gender as it is lived and gender as it is constructed. At the end of the essay I discuss these issues in the context of interpersonal violence.

An easy way to start a discussion of this relationship is to recall that discourses about sexuality and gender frequently construct women and men as different sorts of individuals or persons. These gendered persons embody different principles of agency - as in the case of many western cultures where male sexuality and persons of the male gender are portrayed as active, aggressive, thrusting and powerful, while female sexuality and persons of the female gender are seen as essentially passive, powerless, submissive and receptive. Such gendered discourses are in all instances constructed through mutual imbrication with the differences of race, class, ethnicity and religion.<sup>2</sup> Thus, individuals, policy makers and institutional and community representatives find it easy to have something of definitive import to say about Muslim men, and white women, and black men and Jewish women, for example. The depressing truth is that few are ever lost for words on such matters of generality and general concern! The intriguing fact about such dominant representations or categorizations is that they have only the most tangential relation to the behaviours, qualities, attributes and self-images of individual women and men. Discourses about gender and gender

categories are not powerful because they provide accurate descriptions of social practices and experiences, but rather because, amongst other things, they engender women and men as persons who are defined by difference. These forms of difference are the result of the workings of signification and discourse, and when brought into play they give rise to the discursive effects that produce gender difference itself, as well as gender categorizations.

Gender difference, like other forms of difference, is not merely an effect of signification or language. If we accept the view that the concept of the individual or person is only intelligible with reference to a culturally and historically specific set of categories, discourses and practices, then we have to acknowledge the different ways in which the categories 'woman' and 'man', and the discourses which employ those categories, are involved in the production and reproduction of notions of personhood and agency. In addition, such categories and discourses participate in the production and reproduction of engendered subjects who use them to generate both representations and self-representations, as part of the process of constructing themselves as persons and agents. It is for this reason that the symbolic categories 'woman' and 'man', and the difference inscribed within and between them, have something to do with the representations, self-representations and day-to-day practices of individual women and men. But we need some way of theorizing how individuals become engendered subjects; that is, how they come to have representations of themselves as women and men, come to make representations of others and come to organize their social practices in such a way as to reproduce dominant categories, discourses and practices. Reproduction is perhaps more problematic here than resistance, but there are clear difficulties about the relationship to be posited between repression and innovation, between ideologies and interpretations. What is it exactly that dominant categories and discourses determine? At what level do they operate? Do any of us really believe that we identify wholeheartedly with the dominant gender categories of our own societies? It often seems that the problem for anthropologists, as for social scientists in general, is to explain how dominant discourses and categories get reproduced when so few people are prepared to acknowledge that they support or believe in them. Anthropologists and sociologists alike tend to argue that different types of societies, usually calibrated according to some develop-

mental schema, vary in the degree to which they permit dissension, internal critique and innovation. Such distinctions may well be overlapped, but what is clear is that any social theory must account both for the reproduction of dominant categories and discourses and for instances of non-reproduction, resistance and change.

Recent social theory has championed the cause of the knowledgeable actor, one engaged in self-reflection and informed about the conditions of the reproduction of society (for example, Giddens, 1979: 5, 72-3). This positive characterization, however, raises inevitable queries about the types of knowledge such actors are supposed to possess. For the purposes of discussion, we can follow Giddens in identifying at least three: unconscious, practical and discursive. Giddens defines the difference between the practical and discursive forms on the basis of an opposition between 'tacit stocks' of knowledge on the one hand and a type of knowledge that actors can actually express in discourse on the other (1979: 5). This straightforward distinction is, of course, highly problematic, not because there is anything particularly erroneous about Giddens's distinction, but because any distinctions between these forms of knowledge are difficult to sustain. For example, if a stock of knowledge is 'tacit', what is the difference between that and its being unconscious? The notion of 'tacit' is clearly meant to imply that the knowledge is practical rather than intellectual; in other words, it is based on things you know how to do or that have been inculcated into you.

This form of knowledge is exactly that which interests Bourdieu, as well as a number of anthropologists (among them Jackson, 1983), though what distinguishes these writers from Giddens is that they lay more emphasis on bodily experience and on the uses of the body (see chapter 4). Focusing on the body immediately raises the question of how to make a distinction between practical and discursive knowledge. It is easy to take Giddens's point here, but only if we privilege linguistic utterances or textual productions based on visual or written forms. If we focus instead on the strategic execution - as anthropologists so often do - of a series of gestures or practical activities, such as the way in which a particular job gets done, then we must ask ourselves whether such conscious strategization is to be characterized as practical or discursive knowledge.

The fact of the matter is that it is not possible to be fully conscious of what you do with your body even when you have clear intentions in mind, nor indeed with regard to speech utterances, as Freud demonstrated long ago. The practical and the discursive are only free of the unconscious for the purposes of social science analysis. We might argue about the nature of this unconscious - does it, for example, have a universal and invariant form? - but it is equally clear that the unconscious itself is formed through practical and discursive engagement with the world (see chapter 2). Unconscious sources of cognition and praxis are obviously crucial to any notion of agency, and particularly one which would want to take account of salient differences, such as those of gender and race. This means that however crucial the concept of the knowledgeable actor is to an emancipatory social science, we must be wary of positing the actor as superhumanly knowledgeable; that is, we must acknowledge that no one can ever be fully aware of the conditions of their own construction.

## Anthropology and the undifferentiated subject

This is particularly important when it comes to a consideration of gender identity as constructed and as lived. We cannot be fully aware of either the unconscious or the social determinants of gender identity, but we can be certain that it is not simply a passive identity acquired through socialization. Identities of all kinds are clearly forged through practical engagement in lives lived, and as such they have both individual and collective dimensions. One of the most difficult sets of processes or relationships to grasp when it comes to a discussion of the construction of engendered subjects is how the social representations of gender affect subjective constructions, and how the subjective representation or self-representation of gender affects its social construction. This task has been rendered near impossible in anthropology because the discipline has traditionally worked with collectivities: other cultures. These collectivities are made up of discrete units or individuals. One consequence of this position is a very specific view of the nature of the relationship between the social and the individual which stresses

that individuals are born into cultures and become members of them through processes of learning and socialization. This implies not only that cultures exist prior to individuals, but that individuals as units exist prior to their contact with the social; that they are somehow singular entities which require a cultural imprint. The weakness of this approach is that it re-creates the individual and the social as antinomies, and is incapable of providing a coherent account of their mutual construction.<sup>3</sup> Since there is no intervening or mediating form, the 'individual' and the social must remain estranged from each other in a shifting series of hierarchical determinations.

This situation is particularly inappropriate for theorizing how people acquire a gender identity, and how they produce and reproduce that identity over time. Until recently, gender identity was completely unproblematic from an anthropological perspective because it was viewed as a direct consequence of exposure to and compliance with cultural categories. In reality, the situation was often very much worse than this because gender identity was frequently assumed to be a straightforward outcome of biological categories, and what was acquired through socialization was really no more than a cultural gloss. Of course, anthropologists were good at handling questions about third genders and other forms of gender difference precisely because they saw them as instances or examples of cultural variation. But this does not alter the fact that the issue of gender identity itself was never seen as a puzzle because it was assumed to be unambiguously determined by cultural categorizations and normative understandings.

Once gender identity is addressed as an enigma, as something that requires explanation, both from a subjective and a collective point of view, it becomes clear that the standard category of individual employed in anthropological writing is inadequate to the task. In spite of the recognition of cross-cultural variability in notions of the individual, person and self (see chapter 2), anthropology habitually deploys a notion of the individual almost completely untouched by recent feminist and post-structuralist critiques of the humanist subject.<sup>4</sup> The terms 'subject' and 'subjectivity' are rarely employed, and the notion of the subject as internally differentiated is largely absent. This essay argues that in order to understand issues of gender identity, both subjectively and socially, anthropology needs a theory of the subject.

The post-structuralist concept of the subject which has emerged from recent debates is quite different from the unified, post-Enlightenment subject which it seeks to deconstruct. The basic premise of post-structuralist thinking on the subject is that discourses and discursive practices provide subject positions, and that individuals take up a variety of subject positions within different discourses.<sup>5</sup> Amongst other things, this means that a single subject can no longer be equated with a single individual. Individuals are multiply constituted subjects, and they can, and do, take up multiple subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices (see chapter 2). Some of these subject positions will be contradictory and will conflict with each other. Thus, the subject in post-structuralist thinking is composed of, or exists as, a set of multiple and contradictory positionings and subjectivities. What holds these multiple subjectivities together so that they constitute agents in the world are such things as the subjective experience of identity, the physical fact of being an embodied subject and the historical continuity of the subject where past subject positions tend to overdetermine present subject positions. The notion of the subject as the site of multiple and potentially contradictory subjectivities is a very useful one. If subjectivity is seen as singular, fixed and coherent, it becomes very difficult to explain how it is that individuals constitute their sense of self - their self-representations as subjects - through several often mutually-contradictory subject positions, rather than through one singular subject position.

The reason that anthropology as a discipline has failed to recognize the potential of this approach to the study of gender and gender identity is connected to its overwhelming preoccupation with cultural difference and to the manner in which it has traditionally handled forms of categorical difference. For example, the symbolic analysis of gender in anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s emphasized that gender systems were culturally constructed and therefore variable. This meant, paradoxically, that this important research stressed inter-cultural at the expense of intra-cultural variation (see chapter 1). The implication was that since all cultures defined, constructed and enacted gender in specific ways, each culture had its own distinctive gender system. However, recent work in anthropology has demonstrated that cultures do not have a single model of gender or a single gender system, but rather a multiplicity of discourses on gender which can vary both contextually



and biographically (Sanday and Goodenough, 1990; Strathern, 1987). These different discourses on gender are frequently contradictory and conflicting. Anthropology, therefore, has begun to move away from a simplistic model of a single gender system into which individuals must be socialized towards a more complex understanding of the way in which individuals come to take up gendered subject positions through engagement with multiple discourses on gender. This move has enabled researchers to focus on processes of failure, resistance and change in the acquisition of gender identity, as well as instances of compliance, acceptance and investment.

An emphasis on resistance and failure – that is, on the partiality of the effects of discourse – helps to explain the evident disparity between the range of discourses on gender which exist in any particular context and the actual self-representations of individual women and men as engendered subjects. However, this move in anthropology is not as radical as it would at first seem, because issues remain about the location of difference. Generally speaking, although anthropology now recognizes the existence of multiple discourses on gender, it still insists on handling them as so many instances of cultural variation within a culture. The notion of the individual has not altered, and nor has the conception of the relationship between the individual/subject and the social. A further intellectual step is required and this involves a recognition of the distinction between locating multiplicity and contradiction between the individual and the ideological/social, and locating such processes and moments of difference within the subject itself. What is necessary is that both levels or moments of difference should be analysed simultaneously; and indeed this is essential since they cannot properly be separated.

It seems evident that individuals do constitute their self-representations as engendered subjects through several different subject positions based on gender. It is equally certain that at different times most individuals will be asked to act out a variety of these subject positions and will have, therefore, to construct themselves and their social practices in terms of a competing set of discourses about what it is to be a woman or a man. These competing notions are not just ideas, because as discourses they have both material and social force. Thus, the enactment of subject positions based on gender provides the conditions for the experience of gender and of gender difference, even as those positions may be resisted or rejected.

Many women acknowledge the feeling of being a different person in different social situations which call for different qualities and modes of femininity. The range of ways of being a woman open to each of us at a particular time is extremely wide but we know or feel we ought to know what is expected of us in particular situations – in romantic encounters, when we are pandering to the boss, when we are dealing with children or posing for fashion photographers. We may embrace these ways of being, these subject positions whole-heartedly, we may reject them outright or we may offer resistance while complying to the letter with what is expected of us. Yet even when we resist a particular subject position and the mode of subjectivity which it brings with it, we do so from the position of an alternative social definition of femininity. (Weedon, 1987: 86)

The experience of gender, of being an engendered subject, is given meaning in discourse and in the practices which those discourses inform. Discourses are structured through difference, and thus women and men take up different subject positions within the same discourse, or rather, the same discourse positions them as subjects in different ways. All the major axes of difference, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and religion, intersect with gender in ways which proffer a multiplicity of subject positions within any discourse. This notion of the engendered subject as the site of multiple differences, and therefore of multiple subjectivities and competing identities, is the result of the recent feminist critique of post-structuralist and deconstructionist theory. This work has been inspired by Lacan's notion of the subject in contradiction and process, but as De Lauretis points out, the feminist rethinking of the post-structuralist subject – what might be termed the post-post-structuralist subject – is crucially different. In particular, she argues that the notion of identity as multiple and even self-contradictory points to a more useful conception of the subject than the one proposed by neo-Freudian psychoanalysis and post-structuralist theories.

For it is not the fragmented, or intermittent, identity of a subject constructed in division by language alone, an 'I' continually prefigured and preempted in an unchangeable symbolic order. It is neither, in short, the imaginary identity of the individualist, bourgeois subject, which is male and white; nor the 'flickering' of the posthumanist Lacanian subject, which is too nearly white and at best (fe)male. What is emerging in feminist writing is, instead, the concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity... an

identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race and class, and often indeed across languages and cultures. (De Lauretis, 1986: 9)

This feminist post-post-structuralist view of the subject is, of course, radically different from the traditional subject of anthropological enquiry, the unitary, whole, rational individual which is prototypically male. The 'person' in anthropological discourse is not only male by default, but is also an individual whose identity is externally guaranteed by difference. Thus, in its unitary nature, the anthropological individual is defined by difference from other individuals in the same culture, as well as by its difference from other individuals in other cultures. The post-post-structuralist subject, on the other hand, is the site of differences; differences which constitute the subject and are 'internal' to it. This notion of an 'internally differentiated subject, constituted in and through discourse, is analytically powerful. It is of particular value in analysing the question of how individuals become engendered and acquire a gender identity in the context of several co-existent discourses on gender, which may contradict and conflict with each other. In order to demonstrate this point, it is necessary to discuss the relationship between multiple gender discourses and other discourses of difference within a single social setting.

### Discourse and domination

Gender discourses are variable cross-culturally. It is clear that many are oppositional, that is, they are constructed around the idea that gender has two forms, one female and one male, and that the categories 'woman' and 'man' which are produced from and through the various discourses of difference are mutually exclusive. But not all gender discourses are premised on the mutual exclusivity of the categories 'woman' and 'man'. In many cultures gender is conceived of processually and femininity and masculinity are qualities of biographically located persons rather than categories (for example, Meigs, 1990; see chapter 2 of this volume). But intercultural variation has to be understood in the context of intracultural variation. The existence of multiple gender discourses within a single social setting means that in many situations a dis-

course which emphasizes the oppositional and mutually exclusive nature of gender categories can exist alongside other discourses which emphasize the processual, mutable and temporary nature of gender assignment. The co-existence of multiple discourses, however, produces a situation in which the different discourses on gender are hierarchically ordered. This ordering may be both contextually and biographically variable, as well as being subject to historical change. The result is that some discourses overdetermine others, and various sub-dominant discourses develop in opposition to dominant ones.

In many cultures oppositional gender discourses are not only structurally and hierarchically dominant, but also hierarchically stratified internally. As, for example, where woman is seen as man's other, what man is not, the lack and the object of man's desire and knowledge. What is important here is that relations of gender difference are frequently hierarchically ordered both within the dominant discourse and between discourses. This gives rise to a situation in which forms of difference come to stand for each other, and the distinctions encoded between them become the primary site for the production of more general effects of power.

Bob Connell argues for the existence of a number of femininities and masculinities within the same social setting, and he provides several interesting examples from Australian and British life which illustrate the hierarchical relations between dominant and sub-dominant discourses. He describes one Australian school where two identifiable groups of boys are in conflict. One group is the 'Bloods', the traditional, sporting, physically active group who are described as 'quite clever little boys who are socially totally inadequate, and yet who have got very good brains. They've all got glasses, short, very fat and that sort of thing' (Connell, 1987: 177). It would be wrong to represent the difference between these masculinities as one of simple choice. For one thing, this pattern of difference, as Connell points out, is a product of the possible subject positions offered to individuals in the school as part of a tension within school policy between success based on sporting achievement and success based on academic excellence. This tension reflects wider social and cultural dynamics about how to succeed in the world, and about what kind of successful masculine self one can be. The school, in order to be attractive to parents and pupils, needs

both kinds of masculinity and rewards both as forms of achievement, albeit in very different ways. However, what is more interesting is the way gender difference is inscribed into this difference between masculinities. In this case the perpetrators of violence, the bullies, are the Bloods, and they persecute the Cyrils because of their effeminacy, their lack of physical prowess and their general passivity and weakness (Connell, 1987: 177-8).

The inscription of gender difference on to the difference between or within multiple femininities and masculinities within the same social setting is of particular interest. One of the things revealed is the extraordinary variety in the types of social practices, discourses and institutions which proffer and work over these multiple femininities and masculinities. The degree to which individuals are able to recognize the alternative subject positions available to them is obviously variable, but the lack of any conscious reflection on the possibility of choice does not mean that individuals do not 'select' from or 'invest' in multiple subject positions (see below). Selection - and this is clearly a problematic term - is something they can do through practice, and is not something they have to be consciously or intellectually aware of (see chapter 4). None the less, the recognition of possible alternative femininities and masculinities is facilitated to a certain degree by the fact that competing discourses are constructed in counterpoint with one another.

Connell provides an example drawn from British advertising, in which he describes two posters. On one, which is for a perfume, a woman strides out boldly in trousers, and this image is intended to depict various things about activity, professionalism, self-determination and so on. In a second poster - and it is worth bearing in mind how often these posters might occur in the same magazine or on the same hoarding - a company advertises its sheer stockings, accompanied by the caption 'For girls who don't want to wear the trousers' (Connell, 1987: 179). In the case of both posters the images of femininity they convey are only comprehensible within wider gender discourses, but their comprehensibility is crucially dependent on the overt reference to the mutually exclusive nature of dominant gender categories. But in the case of the advert for perfume it is precisely that gap between dominant gender categories and the actualities of individual women's experience of gender identity and gender roles which the poster seeks to play with. It is this element of play which makes the advertisement, and hence the product it

promotes, seductive. The poster which advertises stockings plays with the same gap, but from the opposite perspective, and engages subtly with anxieties about changing definitions of gender roles. In a sense both posters play with each other, interrupt and continue each other's narratives. This parodic play is a noticeable feature of much contemporary advertising. What is interesting about it, of course, is that it continually reinscribes dominant categories and discourses through reference to a fixed relationship of difference, whilst appearing to embody challenge, resistance and change.

It is through engagement with and investment in the subject positions offered by discourses at this level that individual women and men succeed in reproducing the dominant cultural discourse, whilst simultaneously standing at some remove from the categories of that discourse. And it is at this level that we can properly speak of the existence of multiple femininities and masculinities, multiple ways of being feminine or masculine within the same context. However, gender as a form of difference cannot be considered in isolation. The mutual imbrication of sets of salient differences means that one form of difference can be made to stand for another and/or that differences invoked in one context can be used to reformulate differences relevant to another. This is a processual and structural feature of human life which is open to historical change and which always requires careful analytical specification. But a major example in many contemporary contexts is the mutual determination of the discourses on gender and race. A number of scholars have described the way in which the categories of race difference are sexualized, so that men in many oppressed populations are portrayed both as hypermasculine and as feminized.<sup>6</sup> This situation is constantly reinforced by the use of popular metaphors in forms of English that elide oppression with a loss of sexual potency and masculinity: emasculation, castration, impotency. In contexts where race and gender are mutually constitutive of each other it is crucial not to slip into a discussion which implies that gender and race are imbricated only for those who are oppressed or designated as other. Black scholars continually emphasize this point, but it is usually ignored or simply repeated as a form of rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> The dominant experience of gender for white people is one that is deeply racialized, precisely because their race is both an unmarked category and constructed in contra-distinction to other race identities.

However, the mutual imbrication of race and gender so familiar at this historical conjuncture cannot necessarily be superimposed on other contexts. 'Race' and 'gender', as they are used in academic and popular discourse, are generalizing terms with very specific assumptions and structures built in, and as such they are historically and contextually bound notions.<sup>8</sup> A number of writers have argued that in western societies, and perhaps globally, a particular type of hegemonic masculinity orders the structural relationship between alternative femininities and masculinities.<sup>9</sup> This is the masculinity associated with global capitalism and the domination of the West in economic and political life, and it is also the masculinity which constructs the self-representations of those men who actually rule the world - of which, perhaps, the most blatant recent example was Ronald Reagan. Connell (1987) argues that through the workings of this hegemonic form of masculinity the dominant constructions of gender are strongly implicated, if not actually inscribed within, other social relationships. Thus, hegemonic masculinity penetrates political and economic relationships in a way that guarantees that domination itself is gendered (Morgan, 1988). Groups or cabals of powerful heterosexual - that is, represented as heterosexual - men dominate both the running of modern states and relations between states, and they thus control the means of public force and violence. These means are not simply, of course, military, but also economic and political. As a result it is not usually necessary to reinforce their domination through the use of actual physical force, unless - as in the recent Gulf War - there is a breakdown of economic and political control.

It is clear that this hegemonic form of masculinity is accompanied by a hegemonic form of racism. The global structures of power are predicated on racial distinctions which are often used both to overdetermine and to substitute for other forms of difference. The most glaring example in Europe at the present time is the use of the words 'Arab' and 'Muslim' as terms of abuse and categories of discrimination (Kabbani, 1986). The way in which one term substitutes for the other indicates the interpenetration of the various discourses of difference. Likewise the current treatment of Iraq by the West shows the importance not just of dominating, but of feminizing and pacifying that which is dominated, in order, at least in part, to establish a hierarchical relationship of domination which appears as natural as gender difference itself.

Violence at the national and international level is strongly sexualized, and the distinction between perpetrators and victims of violence is often represented as a genderized difference. Gender, or rather genderized difference, comes to stand for very real differences in power between groups of people and between individuals, and in many contexts is constructed with reference to discourses of racial difference. Gender and race idioms are thus frequently used to order differences in power and/or prestige, with the result that power itself is represented in many contexts as sexualized and racialized.

These forms of hegemonic masculinity and racism are recognizably western; that is, they are connected to the rise of western economic and political power and they are part of a western discourse on otherness. None the less, it is worth pointing out that this particular form of hegemonic masculinity is now global, and it is significant that it has found resonances with a number of local or indigenous masculinities. It is not now possible to analyse discourses on gender, wherever they occur, without recognizing the ways in which they are implicated in larger processes of economic and political change well beyond the control of local communities. The personal experience of gender and gender relations is bound up with power and political relations on a number of different levels. One consequence of this is that fantasies of power are fantasies of identity.

### Investing in identity

The discussion in the previous section emphasized that there is no single femininity or masculinity for individual women and men to identify with in their social settings, but a variety of possible femininities and masculinities which are provided by the contradictory and competing discourses which exist, and which produce and are reproduced by social practices and institutions. However, sexuality is intimately connected with power in such a way that power and force are themselves sexualized, that is, they are inscribed with gender difference and with gender hierarchy. This connection does not have to be confined to a discussion of dominant forms of western masculinity or discourses on gender, though it does presuppose the existence of a dominant discourse on gender, which can in

theory be a locally specific one. There are two points which arise from this argument. First, femininity and masculinity cannot be taken as singular, fixed features which are exclusively located in women and men. We must agree to this if we recognize that subjectivity is non-unitary and multiple, and that it is the product, amongst other things, of the variable discourses and practices concerning gender and gender difference. Women and men come to have different understandings of themselves as engendered persons because they are differentially positioned with regard to discourses concerning gender and sexuality, and they take up different positions within those discourses.

The advantage of a theory which stresses the existence of competing, potentially contradictory discourses on gender and sexuality rather than a single discourse is that we can ask the question, how is it that people take up a position in one discourse as opposed to another? This question was posed at the beginning of this essay and has not yet been answered. If becoming an engendered person is not just a matter of acquiescing to or identifying with a single femininity or masculinity, then what is it that makes people take up particular subject positions as opposed to others? What accounts for the differences between people with regard to their self-representations as engendered individuals? Why do men differ from each other with regard to their understanding of masculinity, and why do women differ with regard to their understandings and representations of femininity, of what it is to be a woman? What is the relationship between discourses and personal identities?

Wendy Holloway has suggested that we can come to an understanding of what makes people take up certain subject positions by developing a notion of 'investment'. If at any one time there exist several competing, possibly contradictory, discourses on femininity and masculinity, then what motivates individuals to take up one subjective position as opposed to another is their degree of 'investment' in a particular subject position. Holloway conceives of an investment as something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest. (Her use of the term has a strong connotation of cathexis.) Such interest or commitment resides in the relative power, conceived of in terms of the satisfaction, reward or payoff, which a particular subject position promises, but does not necessarily provide (Holloway, 1984: 238). It is clear that the term 'investment' could be problematic here because of its economic

overtones. But it is useful precisely because it allows us to retain a link between questions of power and questions of identity. If we imagine that individuals take up certain subject positions because of the way in which those positions provide pleasure, satisfaction or reward on the individual or personal level, we must also recognize that such individual satisfactions have power and meaning only in the context of various institutionalized discourses and practices, that is, in the context of certain sanctioned modes of subjectivity. Holloway emphasizes the very important point that taking up a position or variety of positions within competing discourses is not just about the construction of self-identity and subjectivity. She argues that to be positioned is always to be positioned in relation to others, and thus, one's interrelations with other individuals - intersubjectivity - will also determine what positions one takes up. In addition, there is the question of the institutional power of dominant or hegemonic discourses, where there are very tangible benefits to be gained from constructing oneself as a particular sort of person and interacting with others in specific sorts of ways. It is important to recognize that investment is a matter not just of emotional satisfaction, but of the very real, material social and economic benefits which are the reward of the senior man, the good wife, the powerful mother or the dutiful daughter in many social situations. It is for this reason that modes of subjectivity and questions of identity are bound up with issues of power, and with the material benefits which may be consequent on the exercise of that power.

It would be a mistake, however, to represent the process of taking up a subject position as one of simple choice. For one thing, the historical contextualization of discourses means that not all subject positions are equal, some positions carry much more social reward than others and some are negatively sanctioned. The role of dominant or hegemonic discourses on gender and gender identity is pivotal here. While non-dominant discourses certainly provide subject positions and modes of subjectivity which might be individually satisfying and which might challenge or resist dominant modes, those individuals who do challenge or resist the dominant discourses on gender and gender identity frequently find that this is at the expense of such things as social power, social approval and even material benefits. The same argument may also explain why those in power are so vulnerable to accusations about their sexuality and sexual behaviour. The second reason why the taking up of a



subject position cannot be seen as a matter of choice is linked to the multiple and contradictory nature of subjectivity. The fact that individuals take up multiple subject positions, some of which may contradict each other, obviously cannot be explained in terms of a theory of rational choice. Holloway's notion of investment reminds us of the emotional and subconscious motivations for taking up various subject positions. In this context/fantasy, in the sense of ideas about the kind of person one would like to be and the sort of person one would like to be seen to be by others, clearly has a role to play. Such fantasies of identity are linked to fantasies of power and agency in the world. This explains why concepts such as reputation are connected not just to self-representations and social evaluations of self, but to the potential for power and agency which a good reputation proffers. The loss of reputation could mean a loss of livelihood, and the lack of good social standing can render individuals incapable of pursuing various strategies or courses of action. The use of the term *fantasy* is important here because it emphasizes the often affective and subconscious nature of investment in various subject positions, and in the social strategies necessary to maintain that investment. I want to turn briefly now to a discussion of the relationship between gender identity and interpersonal violence as a way of considering these issues in a more concrete manner.

### Gender identity and interpersonal violence

Holloway herself does not discuss the relationship between identity, subjectivity, power and violence. However, it is possible to suggest a link between the thwarting of investments in various subject positions based on gender and interpersonal violence. Thwarting can be understood as the inability to sustain or properly take up a gendered subject position, resulting in a crisis, real or imagined, of self-representation and/or social evaluation. Such crises can be of various degrees of seriousness and of variable duration. Thwarting can also be the result of contradictions arising from the taking up of multiple subject positions, and the pressure of multiple expectations about self-identity or social presentation. It may also come about as the result of other persons refusing to take up or sustain their subject positions *vis-à-vis* oneself and thereby

calling one's self-identity into question. A phrase such as 'she/he wasn't a proper wife/husband to me' emphasizes the intersubjective nature of questions of gender and gender identity. It is equally a phrase which can cover everything from a failure of sexual relations to the failure of economic provisions. Thus, thwarting can characterize the inability to receive the expected satisfactions or rewards from the taking up of a particular gendered subject position or mode of subjectivity. It is, of course, not necessary for an individual to have a specific, conscious view of what the satisfactions or rewards ought to be for them to experience thwarting.

Many writers report that violence is often the outcome of an inability to control other people's sexual behaviour, that is, other people's management of themselves as engendered individuals. This explains violence not only between women and men, but also between mothers and daughters, between sisters-in-law and between men themselves. In all such situations what is crucial is the way in which the behaviour of others threatens the self-representations and social evaluations of oneself. Thus, it is the perpetrator of violence who is threatened and experiences thwarting.

Interestingly enough, many violent events occur in situations where the thwarted party is likely to suffer direct material loss, whether in terms of social status or access to economic resources, as a result of the insufficiencies – so perceived – of the victim of the violence. Once again, fantasies of identity are linked to fantasies of power, which helps to explain why violence is so often the result of a perceived, rather than a real, threat. For example, wives are frequently beaten for imagined infidelities, which makes violence and the threat of violence so much more effective as a means of social control.

Peter Wade's discussion of gender relations and violence in Colombia demonstrates the existence of multiple and contradictory discourses on gender, and the way in which the dominant discourse on gender emphasizes that the differences between women and men are categorical (1994). His article is particularly useful because it shows extremely clearly how the goals of identity and personhood are different for women and men, and how engaged individuals are in strategies which invest in and maintain particular self-representations and social evaluations. Dominant discourses, and the differential subject positions which those discourses proffer



women and men, work to limit the strategies which individuals can pursue. The evident satisfactions and rewards, many of them actually economic, which follow on from the successful management of modes of gendered subjectivity – most particularly for men – are directly demonstrated. The relationship between fantasies of masculine identity and fantasies of power is especially volatile. Men have an investment in two competing discourses, one the providing of husband/father and the other the *hombre parrandero*. The fantasy of masculine identity is predicated on the ability to balance these two modes. Men, therefore, have to pursue strategies to get their wives to submit to their interests, with the result that there is often conflict between spouses over the man's extra-domestic commitments. Discourses on gender identity, as Wade points out, structure relations not only with women, but also with other men. To be an *hombre parrandero* is a source of prestige among men, as well as an expression of male solidarity, and whilst participation in *parrandas* certainly establishes close and affective relations with other men, it also provides a man with a crucial economic network. Thus, successful economic strategies involve successful management of gender identity. The volatile relationship between fantasies of identity and fantasies of power frequently gives rise to violence both between women and men and between men. The successful man is one who manages the relationship between the role of husband/father and the *hombre parrandero*, and thus contains and controls his domestic situation, while at the same time keeping up his reputation as a good friend. The crucial point here is representation and others' interpretation of that representation. The perfect husband and the perfect friend do not exist, but their images and effects must be kept constantly in play. In this sense violence, when it occurs, is the result of a crisis of representation, as well as the result of conflict between social strategies which are intimately connected to those modes of representation.

Wade emphasizes that the experience of identity is bound up with the experience of power, and that challenges to the exercise of power or to its effects in terms of status, strategies and interests are perceived as threats to identity. The obverse appears equally true, so that challenges levelled at an individual's gender identity and gender management, specifically as these are reflected in the behaviour of others to whom that individual is closely connected, may be perceived as a threat to power, position, control and even assets.

Penny Harvey (1994) provides two interesting examples. The first is of a woman regularly beaten by her husband, who reported that his behaviour could be attributed to the fact that he was seeing another woman, and that this always makes men vicious towards their wives, especially when their lovers are not really under their control. It was significant in this case that the man's lover was also the lover of one of the local policemen. The second is the example of a woman who was severely beaten by her husband, allegedly for all the faults of his other lovers, calling them by name as he did so. In both cases the violence is potentially explicable, in part, as the thwarting of the expected outcome of particular modes of gendered subjectivity. And, in both cases the self-representations of the individual men as gendered persons included the right and the power to have extra-marital relations as part of a definition of masculinity as active and aggressive, and hierarchically defined in relation to femininity. The wider Andean cultural understanding of complementarity as predicated on hierarchical difference is particularly relevant here, as Harvey points out. However, the ability to pursue extra-marital relations is a consequence of a number of factors: amongst these are gender discourses, gender identities, the hierarchical nature of gender difference and a particular set of gender relations. But the reality of the situation, as the ethnography makes clear, is that in the context of these specific extra-marital relations attributes of desirable masculinity, far from being confirmed, are challenged, perhaps even denied. The men cannot control their lovers as they would wish, they cannot control other men's access to these women and therefore they cannot control the definition of their own masculinity because they cannot control the definition of or the social practices surrounding the femininity of their lovers. The only women they can control are their wives; and it is they who confirm their husbands' masculinity by their proper adoption of the opposite feminine subject position, and so their husbands hit them. Once again violence is the consequence of a crisis in representation, both individual and social. The inability to maintain the fantasy of power triggers a crisis in the fantasy of identity, and violence is a means of resolving this crisis because it acts to reconfirm the nature of a masculinity otherwise denied.

In those social settings where dominant discourses on gender construct the categories 'woman' and 'man' as mutually exclusive and hierarchically related the representation of violence itself is

highly sexualized, and is inseparable from the notion of gender and, in particular, from the notion of gender difference. However, gender difference is not the only form of difference employed in the representation of violence. Other forms of difference, notably class and race, are crucial in the formation of discourses on social identity, and are constitutive of modes of subjectivity in the same way as gender. It follows, therefore, that these forms of difference will be strongly implicated in the relationship established between fantasies of power and fantasies of identity. Whenever that relationship is called into question, violence, or the threat of violence, may result. In making this argument I do not want to fall into the trap of suggesting that all violence is of similar origin, and/or that there is no difference between the forms and degrees of violence, or in terms of its incidence. But I do want to suggest that in terms of interpersonal violence, and with regard to the relationship between violence and particular forms of difference – gender, race, class – we might come closer to an understanding of the phenomenon if we shift our gaze and move from imagining violence as a breakdown in the social order – something gone wrong – to seeing it as the sign of a struggle for the maintenance of certain fantasies of identity and power. When we come to a final consideration of the relationship between violence and gender, it is clear that violence of all kinds is engendered in its representation, in the way it is thought about and constituted as a social fact. In its enactment as a social practice it is part of a discourse, albeit a contradictory and fragmented discourse, about gender difference.

## 4

### BODIES ON THE MOVE: GENDER, POWER AND MATERIAL CULTURE

#### Gender difference and the material world

Bodies take metaphors seriously. The phrase is Bourdieu's (1990c: 71-2), and its suggestive power has much to do with the immediate recognition that we all live our lives through actions performed in structured space and time. The material world that surrounds us is one in which we use our living bodies to give substance to the social distinctions and differences that underpin social relations, symbolic systems, forms of labour and quotidian intimacies. Theories of gender difference – and indeed other forms of difference – frequently give insufficient attention both to bodily praxis as a mode of knowledge and to the material context in which that practice takes place.

The contemporary social sciences now take it as axiomatic that gender is a cultural construct, that, far from being natural objects, women and men are fundamentally cultural constructions. The obvious fact of biological differences between women and men tells us nothing about the general social significance of those differences; and although human societies all over the world recognize biological differences between women and men, what they make of those differences is extraordinarily variable. We cannot deal, therefore, with the observable variability in the cultural constructions of gender across the world or through historical time simply by appealing to the indisputable fact of sexual difference.