SHORT INTRODUCTIONS

Gender

Second edition



RAEWYN CONNELL

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Preface

Gender is a key dimension of personal life, social relations and culture. It is an arena in which we face difficult practical issues about justice, identity and even survival.

Gender is also a topic on which there is a great deal of prejudice, myth and outright falsehood. Many people believe that women and men are psychologically opposites, that men are more intelligent than women, that men are naturally violent, or that gender patterns never change. All these beliefs are factually wrong. Many people imagine masculinity, femininity and gender relations only in terms of their own local gender system. They miss the vast diversity of gender patterns across cultures and down history.

Research and theory in the human sciences provide vital tools for dispelling prejudices and understanding the real issues. Therefore this book tries to present an accessible, research-based, globally informed and theoretically coherent account of gender.

For people new to the study of gender, I introduce key examples of gender research, describe the main findings on key topics, and provide a map of debates and ideas. For people already working on gender issues, I propose an integrated approach that links issues ranging from the body and personality difference to the global economy and world peace. To understand these questions, we have to move across conventional boundaries between academic disciplines. Accordingly, the book draws on a spectrum of the human sciences, from psychology and sociology to political science, cultural studies, education and history.

Psychological and social sciences are relatively new forms of knowledge. Based on both empirical research and conceptual reasoning, the

human sciences seek to build knowledge over time. This requires us to be energetic in seeking out new information, and at the same time open to critique and willing to change obsolete ideas. When these processes work well, the human sciences provide a powerful way of understanding our social life.

Modern research on gender was triggered by the women's movement for gender equality. There is a simple reason for this: most gender orders, around the world, privilege men and disadvantage women. That is a basic fact; yet the details are not simple. There are different forms of privilege and disadvantage, ranging from pure symbolism to brutal violence. The dêgree of gender inequality varies from place to place. The costs of privilege may be high. Even the definition of who is a man and who is a woman can be contested.

Gender issues are about men quite as much as they are about women. There is now extensive research and public debate about masculinities, fatherhood, men's movements, men's violence, boys' education, men's health and men's involvement in achieving gender equality. In this book I have woven this research systematically into the picture of gender.

I have also taken account of the fact that gender reform and gender science are world-wide. We must acknowledge the creative role of intellectuals from Europe and North America in understanding gender problems. But the view from the global North is not the only possible view of the world. Therefore I give considerable attention to gender research and theory in countries outside the global metropole, places as diverse as Latvia, Chile, Australia, western and southern Africa, and Japan.

We particularly need an international approach to gender studies now. The deepening of economic interdependence, the creation of global media, the interlinking of political systems, all of which are now called 'globalization', have powerful implications for gender. In front of our eyes, new gender orders are being created: through labour migration, in transnational corporations and global markets, in transnational media and international state structures. New identities and movements are created, and knowledge about them circulates globally.

The world faces new and urgent issues about gender. Indeed, a whole new realm of gender politics is emerging, with sharp questions about human rights, economic equality, environmental impacts, relations between generations, violence and well-being.

If the emerging gender orders are to be just, peaceful and humane – which is by no means guaranteed – we need well-founded knowledge and sophisticated understanding of gender issues. To produce this knowledge and understanding must be a shared project around the globe. I hope this book will contribute to this work. Its first edition, written in English, has been translated into Italian, Greek, Chinese, Swedish and

Japanese. This second edition expands the coverage of international research and theory and I hope will continue the global dialogue.

A book that tries to synthesize knowledge across a broad field of study rests on the labour of many people – researchers, theorists, social movement activists, and the many people who contribute to research projects as 'subjects'. The Women's Liberation movement emphasized the collective production of ideas and I have tried to acknowledge that in the text.

At the same time, any book reflects the author's personal background. I am a professional social scientist with a long experience of research and teaching, some of it directly about gender but some of it also about class, education, child development and social theory. I have lived most of my life in Australia, a rich country in the global periphery, the product of British settler colonialism. I read several languages, but all are European-derived, and this limits my knowledge of global research and debate. I have tried to expand this knowledge through translations and travel. I have visited nearly thirty other countries and talked with social scientists in most of them.

I have a personal, not just intellectual, engagement in these issues. Much of my research has been designed to help reforms such as gender equality in the public service, or to serve causes such as AIDS prevention. I have a lively interest in the gender politics of relationships because my partner and I debated them, and lived them, for twenty-nine years. I have a close interest in parent/child relations because I am a parent, for years a sole parent. My personal experience of gender has involved strong contradictions. Being a transsexual woman has, perhaps, given me some empathy across the conventional gender divide.

Most of my intellectual debts are acknowledged in the text. I owe particular thanks to: John Fisher for research assistance; Christabel Draffin for clerical assistance; Patricia Selkirk for expert advice on biology; Carol Hagemann-White for posing crucial questions about theory and politics; Robert Morrell, Ulla Müller, Taga Futoshi and Teresa Valdés for opening cultural worlds for me; Toni Schofield for demanding relevance; Lin Walker for demanding coherence; Kirsten Gomard for demanding precision. I thank all these people, and other friends, for providing vital encouragement and support. Kylie Benton-Connell has provided support and inspiration in more ways than I can say. The book is dedicated to the memory of her mother, my partner, Pam Benton. The epigraph at the start of the book is from Pam's favourite poet, John Donne, and can be found in the poem 'The second Anniversarie'.

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The question of gender

Noticing gender

One night a year, the attention of the TV-watching world is focused on Hollywood's most spectacular event, the Oscar award ceremony. Famous people are driven up in limousines in front of an enthusiastic crowd, and in a blizzard of camera flashes they walk into the auditorium – the men in tuxedos striding easily, the women going cautiously because they are wearing low-cut gowns and high-heeled shoes. As the evening wears on, awards are given out for film score, camera work, script writing, direction, best foreign film, and so on. But in the categories that concern the people you see on screen when you go to the movies, there are *two* awards given: best actor *and* best actress; best supporting actor *and* best supporting actress.

On my way to work in the morning, I pass a news-agency that displays posters for the week's mass-circulation magazines. Almost every poster shows a young woman, usually blonde, dangerously thin, heavily made up, very pretty, and not doing anything. These women are known in the media trade as 'celebs'. Deeper in the shop are magazines about motor bikes, cars, sport, power boats and fishing. These may also have pictures of blonde young women on the cover, in rather more pornographic poses than the ones outside, but also show men, who will be riding the bikes, driving the cars and boats, and catching stupendous fish.

In September 2007 my home town of Sydney, noted for its excellent fish, hosted an international gathering called the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum. The centre of the city was blocked off by

heavy concrete barriers, wire, and rows of police drafted in from all over the state. Behind the wire, protected from the annoyance of the townspeople, was a formidable concentration of global power. Those present included Mr Hu, the president of China; Mr Putin, the president of Russia; Mr Bush, the president of the United States; Mr Yudhoyono, the president of Indonesia; as well as minor figures like Mr Howard, the prime minister of Australia. At the end of this conference there is traditionally a group photograph of the leaders wearing folkloric shirts from the host country; in this case, folkloric raincoats. The photograph, taken in front of the Sydney Opera House, shows eighteen middle-aged men, trying to hide their embarrassment, and three women.

This balance is hardly unusual. If Hillary Clinton had won the Democratic Party nomination, she would have become the first woman major-party candidate for president in the 200-year history of the United States. There has never been a woman head of government in modern Russia, China, France, Brazil, Japan, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa or Mexico, and only one each in the history of Germany, Britain, India and Indonesia. Every secretary-general of the United Nations and every head of the World Bank has been a man. In the same year as the APEC forum, 2007, statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union showed that 82.5 per cent of members of the world's parliaments were men.

Among cabinet ministers, the predominance of men is even higher. In 2005, just two countries in the world had women making up half of a national cabinet (Sweden and Spain). More typical figures for the representation of women were 14 per cent (United States, Ecuador), 10 per cent (Algeria), 8 per cent (Italy, Argentina), 6 per cent (China) and 0 per cent (Saudi Arabia, Russia). The few women who do get to this level are usually given the job of running welfare or education ministries. Men keep control of taxation, investment, technology, international relations, police and the military.

What is true of politics is also true of business. Of the top 200 businesses listed on the Australian stock exchange in 2007 (including those that publish the mass-circulation magazines), just 5 had a woman as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Of the 500 giant international corporations listed in *Fortune* magazine's 'Global 500' in 2007, just 10 had a woman CEO. Such figures are usually presented by saying that women now form 2 per cent of the top business leadership around the world. It's more informative to say that men compose 98 per cent of that leadership.

Women are a substantial part of the paid workforce, lower down the hierarchy. They are mostly concentrated in service jobs – clerical work, call centres, cleaning, serving food, and professions connected with caring for the young and the sick, i.e. teaching and nursing. In some

parts of the world, women are also valued as industrial workers, for instance in microprocessor plants, because of their supposedly 'nimble fingers'. Though the detailed division between men's and women's work varies in different parts of the world, it is common for men to predominate in heavy industry, mining, transport, indeed in most jobs that involve any machinery except a sewing machine. World-wide, men are a large majority of the workforce in management, accountancy, law and technical professions such as engineering and computing.

Behind the paid workforce is another form of work – unpaid domestic and care work. In all contemporary societies for which we have statistics, women do most of the cleaning, cooking and sewing, most of the work of looking after children, and almost all of the work of caring for babies. (If you don't think this is work, you haven't done it yet.) This work is often associated with a cultural definition of women as caring, gentle, self-sacrificing and industrious, i.e. as good mothers. Being a good father is rarely associated with cutting school lunches and wiping babies' bottoms – though there are now interesting attempts to promote what in Mexico has been called 'paternidad afectiva', i.e. emotionally engaged fatherhood. Normally, fathers are supposed to be decision-makers and breadwinners, to consume the services provided by women and represent the family in the outside world.

Women are less likely to be out in the public world than men, and, when they are, have fewer resources. In almost all parts of the world, men are more likely to have a paid job. The world 'economic activity rate' for women has crept up, but is still just over two-thirds of the rate for men. The main exceptions are Scandinavia and parts of west Africa, where women's relative labour force participation rates are unusually high. But in some Arab states women's participation rates are one-quarter the rate for men, and in much of south Asia and Latin America they are about half the rate for men.

Once in the workforce, how do wages compare? Thirty years after the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, nowhere in the world are women's earned incomes equal to men's. They reach 81 per cent of men's earned incomes in Sweden; but more typical figures are: 64 per cent of men's incomes in France, 63 per cent in the United States, 55 per cent in Ukraine, 46 per cent in Indonesia, 39 per cent in Mexico.

Therefore, most women in the world, especially women with children, are economically dependent on men. Some men believe that women who are dependent on them must be their property. This is a common scenario in domestic violence: when dependent women don't conform to demands from their husband or boyfriend, they are beaten. This creates a dilemma for the women, which is very familiar to domestic violence

services. They can stay, and put themselves and their children at high risk of further violence; or go, and lose their home, economic support and status in the community. If they go, certain husbands are so infuriated that they pursue and kill the wives and even the children.

Men are not beaten up by their spouses so often, but men are at risk of other forms of violence. Most assaults reported to the police, in countries with good statistics on the matter, are by men on other men. Some men are beaten, indeed some are murdered, simply because they are thought to be homosexual; and some of this violence comes from the police. Most of the prisoners in gaols are men. In the United States, which has the biggest prison system in the world, in mid-2007 there was a prison population of 1.59 million, and 92.8 per cent were men. Most deaths in combat are men, because men make up the vast majority of the troops in armies and militias. Most industrial accidents involve men, because men are most of the workforce in dangerous industries such as construction and mining.

Men are involved disproportionately in violence partly because they have been prepared for it. Though patterns of child rearing differ between cultures, the situation in Australia is not unusual. Australian boys are steered towards competitive sports such as football, where physical dominance is celebrated, from an early age – by their fathers, by schools and by the mass media. Boys also come under peer pressure to show bravery and toughness, and learn to fear being classified as 'sissies' or 'poofters' (a local term meaning effeminate or homosexual). Being capable of violence becomes a social resource. Working-class boys, who don't have the other resources that will lead to a professional career, become the main recruits into jobs that require the use of force: police, the military, private security, blue-collar crime and professional sport. It is mainly young women who are recruited into the jobs that repair the consequences of violence: nursing, psychology and social work.

So far, I have listed an assortment of facts, about mass media, about politics and business, about families and about growing up. Are these random? Modern thought about gender starts with the recognition that they are not. These facts form a pattern; they make sense when seen as parts of the overall gender arrangement, which I will call the gender order, of contemporary societies.

To notice the existence of the gender order is easy; to understand it is not. Conflicting theories of gender now exist, and some problems about gender are genuinely difficult to resolve. Yet we now have a rich resource of knowledge about gender, derived from decades of research, and a fund of practical experience from gender reform. We now have a better basis for understanding gender issues than any previous generation had.

Understanding gender

In everyday life we take gender for granted. We instantly recognize a person as a man or woman, girl or boy. We arrange everyday business around the distinction. Conventional marriages require one of each. Mixed doubles tennis requires two of each, but most sports require one kind at a time.

Next to Oscar night, the most popular television broadcast in the world is said to be the American Super Bowl, another strikingly gendered event: large armoured men crash into each other while chasing a pointed leather bladder, and thin women in short skirts dance and smile in the pauses. Most of us cannot crash or dance nearly so well, but we do our best in other ways. As women or men we slip our feet into differently shaped shoes, button our shirts on opposite sides, get our heads clipped by different hairdressers, buy our pants in separate shops, and take them off in separate toilets.

These arrangements are so familiar that they can seem part of the order of nature. Belief that gender distinction is 'natural' makes it scandalous when people don't follow the pattern – for instance, when people of the same gender fall in love with each other. So homosexuality is frequently declared 'unnatural' and bad.

But if having sex with a fellow-woman or a fellow-man is unnatural, why have a law against it? We don't provide penalties for violating the third law of thermodynamics. Anti-gay ordinances in United States' cities, police harassment of gay men in Senegal, the criminalization of women's adultery in Islamic Sharia law, the imprisonment of transsexual women for violating public order – such things only make sense because these matters are *not* fixed by nature.

These events are part of an enormous social effort to channel people's behaviour. Ideas about gender-appropriate behaviour are constantly being circulated, not only by legislators but also by priests, parents, teachers, advertisers, retail mall owners, talk-show hosts and disc jockeys. Events like Oscar night and the Super Bowl are not just consequences of our ideas about gender difference. They also help to *create* gender difference, by displays of exemplary masculinities and femininities.

Being a man or a woman, then, is not a pre-determined state. It is a *becoming*, a condition actively under construction. The pioneering French feminist Simone de Beauvoir put this in a classic phrase: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' Though the positions of women and men are not simply parallel, the principle is also true for men: one is not born masculine, but has to become a man.

This process is often discussed as the development of 'gender identity'. I have some doubts about this concept (see chapter 6), but it will serve for the moment as a name for the sense of belonging to a gender category. Identity includes our ideas of what that belonging means, what kind of person we are, in consequence of being a woman or a man. These ideas are not presented to the baby as a package at the beginning of life. They develop (there is some controversy about exactly when), and are filled out in detail over a long period of years, as we grow up.

As de Beauvoir further recognized, this business of becoming a gendered person follows many different paths, involves many tensions and ambiguities, and sometimes produces unstable results. Part of the mystery of gender is how a pattern that on the surface appears so stark and rigid, on close examination turns out so complex and uncertain.

So we cannot think of womanhood or manhood as fixed by nature. But neither should we think of them as simply imposed from outside, by social norms or pressure from authorities. People construct *themselves* as masculine or feminine. We claim a place in the gender order – or respond to the place we have been given – by the way we conduct ourselves in everyday life.

Most people do this willingly, and often enjoy the gender polarity. Yet gender ambiguities are not rare. There are masculine women and feminine men. There are women in love with other women, and men in love with other men. There are women who are heads of households, and men who bring up children. There are women who are soldiers and men who are nurses. Sometimes the development of 'gender identity' results in intermediate, blended or sharply contradictory patterns, for which we use terms like 'effeminate', 'camp', 'queer' and 'transgender'.

Psychological research suggests that the great majority of us combine masculine and feminine characteristics, in varying blends, rather than being all one or all the other. Gender ambiguity can be an object of fascination and desire, as well as disgust. Gender impersonations are familiar in both popular and high culture, from the cross-dressed actors of Shakespeare's stage to drag movies like *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert.*

There is certainly enough gender blending to provoke heated opposition from movements dedicated to re-establishing 'the traditional family', 'true femininity' or 'real masculinity'. By 1988 the Pope had become so concerned that he issued an Apostolic Letter, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, reminding everyone that women were created for motherhood and their functions should not get mixed up with those of men. The efforts to maintain strong divisions are themselves strong evidence that the boundaries are none too stable.

But these are not just boundaries, they are also inequalities. Most churches and mosques are run exclusively by men, and this is part of a larger pattern. Most corporate wealth is in the hands of men, most big institutions are run by men, and most science and technology is controlled by men. In many countries, including some with very large populations, women are less likely than men to have been taught to read. For instance, recent adult literacy rates in India stood at 73 per cent for men and 48 per cent for women; in Nigeria, 78 per cent for men and 60 per cent for women. On a world scale, two-thirds of illiterate people are women. In countries like the United States, Australia, Italy and Turkey, middle-class women have gained full access to higher education and have made inroads into middle management and professions. But even in those countries many informal barriers operate to keep the very top levels of power and wealth mostly a world of men.

There is also unequal respect. In many situations, including the cheerleaders at the football game, women are treated as marginal to the main action, or as the objects of men's desire. Whole genres of humour – bimbo jokes, woman-driver jokes, mother-in-law jokes – are based on contempt for women's triviality and stupidity. A whole industry, ranging from heavy pornography and prostitution to soft-core advertising, markets women's bodies as objects of consumption by men. Equal-opportunity reforms in the workplace often run into a refusal by men to be under the authority of a woman. Not only do most religions prevent women from holding major religious office, they often treat women symbolically as a source of defilement for men.

Though men in general benefit from the inequalities of the gender order, they do not benefit equally. Indeed, many pay a considerable price. Boys and men who depart from dominant definitions of masculinity because they are gay, effeminate or simply wimpish are often subject to verbal abuse and discrimination, and are sometimes the targets of violence. Men who conform to dominant definitions of masculinity may also pay a price. Research on men's health shows that men have a higher rate of industrial accidents than women, have a higher rate of death by violence, tend to eat a worse diet and drink more alcohol, and (not surprisingly) have more sporting injuries. In 2005, the life expectancy for men in the United States was calculated at seventy-five years, compared with eighty years for women. In Russia, after the restoration of capitalism, life expectancy for men was fifty-nine years, compared with seventy-two years for women.

Gender arrangements are thus, at the same time, sources of pleasure, recognition and identity, and sources of injustice and harm. This means that gender is inherently political – but it also means the politics can be complicated and difficult.

Inequality and oppression in the gender order have repeatedly led to demands for reform. Movements for change include campaigns for women's right to vote, and for women's presence in anti-colonial movements and representation in independent governments; campaigns for equal pay, for women's right to own property, for homosexual law reform, for women's trade unionism, for equal employment opportunity, for reproductive rights, for the human rights of transsexual men and women and transgender people; and campaigns against discrimination in education, against sexist media, against rape and domestic violence.

Political campaigns resisting some of these changes, or seeking counter-changes, have also arisen. The scene of gender politics currently includes anti-gay campaigns, anti-abortion ('pro-life') campaigns, a spectrum of men's movements, and a complex international debate about links between Western feminism and Western cultural dominance in the world.

In this history, the feminist and gay movements of the 1960s–1970s were pivotal. They did not reach all their political goals, but they had a profound cultural impact. They called attention to a whole realm of human reality that was poorly understood, and thus created a demand for understanding as well as action. This was the historical take-off point of contemporary gender research. Political practice launched a deep change – which increasingly seems like a revolution – in human knowledge.

This book is an attempt to map this revolution. It describes the terrain revealed by gender politics and gender research, introduces the debates about how to understand it and change it, and offers solutions to some of the problems raised.

In chapter 2, I discuss five notable examples of gender research, to show how the broad issues just discussed take shape in specific investigations. Chapter 3 discusses theories and models of gender, and the intellectuals who produce them. Chapter 4 turns to the issue of 'difference', the extent of sex differences, and the way bodies and society interact. This requires an account of gender as a social structure, which I present in chapter 5, exploring the different dimensions of gender and the process of historical change. Chapter 6 discusses gender on the small scale, in personal life, and looks at the emerging debate about gender transition. Chapter 7 moves to the large scale, looking at gender relations in institutions and world society. Chapter 8 is a kind of synthesis, focused on gender politics, considering what is at stake in movements for change. Here I raise questions about both the micro-politics of personal life, and the large-scale politics of institutions and movements, ending with a discussion of gender politics in world society.

Defining gender

As a new awareness of issues developed, a new terminology was needed. From the 1970s, the term 'gender' has become common in English-language discussions to describe the whole field (though it has never been universally accepted). The term was borrowed from grammar. Ultimately it comes from an ancient word-root meaning 'to produce' (cf. 'generate'), which gave rise to words in many languages meaning 'kind' or 'class' (e.g. 'genus'). In grammar 'gender' came to refer to the specific distinction between classes of nouns 'corresponding more or less' – as the nineteenth-century *Oxford English Dictionary* primly noted – 'to distinctions of sex' (and absence of sex) in the objects denoted'.

Grammar suggests how such distinctions permeate cultures. In Indo-European and Semitic languages, nouns, adjectives and pronouns may be distinguishable as feminine, masculine, neuter or common gender. Not only the words for species that reproduce sexually may be gendered, but also many other words for objects, concepts and states of mind. English is a relatively un-gendered language, but English speakers still call a ship 'she', and even an oil well ('she's going to blow!').

Language is an important aspect of gender, but does not provide a consistent framework for understanding it. German, for instance, has 'die Frau' (the woman) feminine, but 'das Mädchen' (the girl) neuter, because all words with such diminutives are neuter. Terror is feminine in French ('la terreur'), but masculine in German ('der Terror'). Other languages, including Chinese, Japanese and Yoruba, do not make gender distinctions through word forms at all. A great deal also depends on how a language is used, not just its grammar. A relatively non-gendered language can still be used to name gender positions and express opinions on gender issues. On the other hand, there are many communities where certain words or tones of voice are specifically thought to belong to men or women, or to express the speaker's masculinity or femininity.

Most discussions of gender in society emphasize a dichotomy. Starting from a presumed biological divide between male and female, they define gender as the social or psychological difference that corresponds to that divide, builds on it or is caused by it.

In its most common usage, then, the term 'gender' means the cultural difference of women from men, based on the biological division between male and female. Dichotomy and difference are the substance of the idea. Men are from Mars, women are from Venus.

There are decisive objections to such a definition.

- Human life does not simply divide into two realms, nor does human character divide into two types. Our images of gender are often dichotomous, but the reality is not. Abundant evidence will be seen throughout this book.
- A definition in terms of difference means that where we cannot see difference, we cannot see gender. With such a definition we could not recognize the gendered character of lesbian or homosexual desire (based on gender similarity). We would be thrown into confusion by research which found only small psychological differences between women and men, which would seem to imply that gender had evaporated. (See chapter 4.)
- A definition based on dichotomy excludes the differences among women, and among men, from the concept of gender. But there are such differences that are highly relevant to the pattern of relations between women and men – for instance, the difference between violent and non-violent masculinities. (See chapter 6.)
- Any definition in terms of personal characteristics excludes processes which lie beyond the individual person. Large-scale social processes are based on the *shared* capacities of women and men more than on their differences. The creation of goods and services in a modern economy is based on shared capacities and cooperative labour – yet the products are often strongly gendered, and the wealth generated is distributed in highly gendered ways, so this must be included in the analysis of gender.

The development of social science has provided a solution to these difficulties. The key is to move from a focus on difference to a focus on *relations*. Gender is, above all, a matter of the social relations within which individuals and groups act.

Enduring or widespread patterns among social relations are what social theory calls 'structures'. In this sense, gender must be understood as a social structure. It is not an expression of biology, nor a fixed dichotomy in human life or character. It is a pattern in our social arrangements, and in the everyday activities or practices which those arrangements govern.

Gender is a social structure, but of a particular kind. Gender involves a specific relationship with bodies. This is recognized in the commonsense definition of gender as an expression of natural difference, the bodily distinction of male from female. We certainly are one of the species that reproduce sexually rather than vegetatively (though cloning may change that soon!). Some aspects of our anatomy are specialized for this purpose, and many biological processes in our bodies are affected by it (see chapter 4). What is wrong with this definition is not the atten-

tion to bodies, nor the concern with sexual reproduction, but the squeezing of biological complexity and adaptability into a stark dichotomy, and the idea that cultural patterns simply 'express' bodily difference.

Sometimes cultural patterns do express bodily difference, for instance when they celebrate first menstruation as a distinction between girl and woman. But often they do more than that, or less than that. In relation to the distinction of male from female bodies, social practices sometimes exaggerate (e.g. maternity clothes), sometimes deny (many employment practices), sometimes mythologize (computer games), sometimes complicate ('third gender' customs). So we cannot say that social arrangements routinely 'express' biological difference.

But we can say that, in all of these cases, society *addresses* bodies and *deals with* reproductive processes and differences among bodies. There is no fixed 'biological base' for the social process of gender. Rather, there is an arena in which bodies are brought into social processes, in which our social conduct *does something* with reproductive difference. I will call this the 'reproductive arena'.

This allows us to define gender in a way that solves the paradoxes of 'difference'. *Gender is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes.* To put it informally, gender concerns the way human society deals with human bodies and their continuity, and the many consequences of that 'dealing' in our personal lives and our collective fate. The terms used in this definition are explained more fully in chapters 4 and 5.

This definition has important consequences; here are some. Gender, like other social structures, is multi-dimensional; it is not just about identity, or just about work, or just about power, or just about sexuality, but all of these things at once. Gender patterns may differ strikingly from one cultural context to another, but are still 'gender'. Gender arrangements are reproduced socially (not biologically) by the power of structures to shape individual action, so they often appear unchanging. Yet gender arrangements are in fact always changing, as human practice creates new situations and as structures develop crisis tendencies. Finally, gender had a beginning and may have an end. Each of these points will be explored later in the book.

Note on sources

Most of the statistics mentioned in this chapter, such as income, economic activity rates and literacy, can be found in the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2007/2008*

(2007; see list of references at back of book), or on-line tables regularly published by the United Nations Statistics Division. Figures on parliamentary representation and numbers of ministers are from Inter-Parliamentary Union (2007), and on managers, from Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) and *Fortune*, 23 July 2007. Sources of information on men's health can be found in Schofield et al. (2000). The quotation on 'woman' is from de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949: 295). Definitions and etymology of the word 'gender' are in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 100.