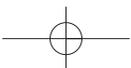
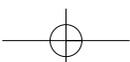
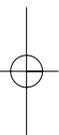
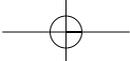


P A R T 1

Gender/Feminist Studies





1

Gender and Feminism: an Overview

In this chapter I initially discuss the term 'gender' in order to place Feminism as a subfield within the overall gender/sexuality field. This discussion also introduces some ongoing themes within that overall field which will be reiterated within the sections on Sexuality and Masculinity Studies. I then turn to an analysis of the first subfield, namely Feminism. Feminism is considered both in specific terms and also as a means to exemplify the methodological approach employed throughout the book. The analysis indicates in a preliminary way some of the features of the three subfields, as well as how I intend to characterise them. In particular, I undertake an account of Feminism that demonstrates how I will delineate the main directions in the gender/sexuality field.

Gender: the meaning of the term

Feminism is one of two subfields (along with Masculinity Studies) that arguably can be situated under the umbrella term 'gender'. For this reason, before we can examine Feminism, some brief account of this term is necessary. 'Gender' typically refers to the social process of dividing up people and social practices along the lines of *sexed identities*. The gendering process frequently involves creating hierarchies between the divisions it enacts. One or more categories of sexed identity are privileged or devalued. In modern Western societies¹ gender divides into two. This is not necessarily the case in other times, places and cultures (see Herdt, 1994). Gender in the modern West usually refers to two distinct and separate categories of human beings (the division into men and women) as well as to the division of social practices into two fields. The gendering of social practices may be found, for example in contemporary Western societies, in a strong association between men and public life and between women and domestic life, even though men and women occupy both spaces.

Gender in Western society refers to a **binary** division (into two categories) of human beings and social practices to the point of this division even being construed as oppositional. We see this at work in the phrase 'the opposite sex'. The two categories are not merely regarded as distinct and opposed, they are also put into a hierarchy in which one is typically cast as positive and the other negative. Cranny-Francis et al. (2003: 2) note in this setting that 'a buddy (a word derived from brother) is a good thing to have, but no one wants to be a sissy (derived from sister)'. Similarly, positive masculine categories such as 'bachelor' may be set against negative feminine equivalents like

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'spinster'. While such categorical distinctions insistently divide, they also indicate connections. The binary nature of gender in Western society means that the features of one category exist in relation to its supposed opposite. To be a man is to be not-woman and vice versa.

Although the account I have provided so far indicates the usual contemporary meanings of gender in Feminist and Masculinity Studies, these meanings have altered over time and continue to be the subject of debate. Prior to the 1960s it was restricted 'primarily to what is coded in language as masculine or feminine' (Richardson, 2001: 5491–3). Many writers today describe gender comparatively narrowly in terms of social identities (men and women) (see Cranny-Francis, 2003: 1–4), while other commentators see it more in terms of social interactions and institutions that form between groups. The latter approach, which rather than locating gender *in* identities, conceives it as a structuring process, may be seen in Bob Connell's notion of 'gender relations' (Connell, 2002: 9; 2000: 23). Different understandings of the term are obviously evident in accounts of what it describes. In recent times it has, for example, been variously extended to denote personality attributes associated with men and women, social constructions broadly linked to the male/female distinction, the existence of social groups (men and women) produced in hierarchical relationship to one another, and social practices enacted through reiteration rather than derived from any natural distinction (Richardson, 2001: 14018). Although gender is commonly linked to social interpretation of reproductive biological distinctions, some analysts reject any suggestion that it is necessarily connected to notions of reproduction.² Attitudes towards gender and social change differ as well. Some writers advocate getting rid of gender and gender categories (Lorber, 2000: 1; Whittle, 1996), while others see such categories at the moment at least as a political starting point and indeed suggest that the premature abandonment of marginal group identities like 'women' may produce political paralysis (Young, 1997a; Bordo, 1990: 33–156).

However gender is understood or regarded by critical thinkers in the gender/sexuality field, in practice it covers or refers to two major subfields – that is, Feminist and Masculinity Studies. While Feminist studies talks largely about women, and Masculinity Studies largely about men, both increasingly discuss both. These subfields tend to focus on only two sexes,³ but recently have begun to allow for more plural sexed identities. To the extent that gender encompasses these subfields, debates about the term itself reveal much about tensions in and between these subfields and provide signals regarding the current shape of the gender/sexuality field as a whole. Such debates about the term therefore offer a useful entry point to introduce the broader field and the discussion of the subfield, Feminism, which follows.

Debates about gender

Debate 1

The term 'gender' is now the dominant coverall one for analysis of sexed identities and practices – that is, for discussing social relations within and between groups identified as men and women (Kemp and Squires, 1997: 11). This dominance is

comparatively recent; the shift from focusing on particular identities, such as occurs in Women's Studies, to a focus on Gender Studies has been disputed by many feminists on the grounds that this involves conveniently moving attention away from women's subordination. Such commentators suggest that the supposedly more neutral language of gender might well involve the imposition of a politically suspect agenda (Libertin, 1987; Evans, 1990: 457–62; Richardson and Robinson, 1994: 11–27; Serematakis, 1994). Gender is here associated with attempts to excise the radical critique of Women's Studies and with prescriptive demands that Women's Studies must be accompanied by a matched emphasis on men (Canaan and Griffen, 1990). By contrast, other writers have suggested that this scepticism is unwarranted. In this context, some note that analysis of gender still largely means a focus upon women, even though it should not (Carver, 1996).

It would seem that the term 'gender' as the 'proper' name for a combined field including Feminist and Masculinity agendas may be deemed problematic on several fronts.⁴ While Masculinity Studies writers are generally more accepting of the terminology, they too often appear concerned about the potential for retreating from a focus on **power** relations between men and women. Moreover, some gay male writers are not convinced that their issues can be adequately addressed under the broad mantle of Gender Studies (Messner, 1997: 80–8; Brod, 1987a: 179–96; Dowsett, 1993; Clark, 1995: 241–55). Indeed a number of writers attending to sexuality see the term as not merely describing a particular socio-historical process of binary division into two sexed categories, but as *prescribing* such a division (Bornstein, 1994: 8, 114–15).

Ironically, it would seem that gender is disputed both on the grounds that it is associated with the diminution of a focus on particular sexed identities (such as 'women') and with the shoring up of such identities. Still others view gender's concern with sexed identities as precisely the means to undo these identities (Lorber, 2000). What this debate signals is an ongoing discussion central to the entire field of gender/sexuality theory regarding the question of whether focus on particular identity groups is politically helpful or harmful.⁵ Discussion about the status of identity politics arises not only in Feminist but also in Sexuality and Masculinity Studies. Identity politics is also a question that highlights very clearly the array of different directions and frames of reference in the gender/sexuality field along a **Modernist–Postmodern** continuum. Indeed, the significance of this question and the way in which it reveals the diversity of thinking in the field is a crucial reason for my usage of the continuum in mapping out field characteristics.

Debate 2

The term 'gender' has also been criticised on the basis that it sets up too sharp a divide between social and natural/bodily. Gender has been used to indicate that nature (bodies) do not necessarily tell you much about human social organisation of sexed identities and practices. In short, a male body does not necessarily result in social masculinity, in a personal identity deemed 'masculine'. Gender in this setting was seen as a reference to 'social construction'. The word implied a radical critique of conservative views that asserted biological determinism. Gender, in other words, suggested a critique of the wide range of views that assumed that bodily 'sex' determines the self

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and that biological sex difference explains human social arrangements. Gender was a term that enabled a questioning of biologicistic presumptions, such as that male bodies are naturally more aggressive, women are less mathematical thinkers, and so on.⁶

However, other thinkers asserted that setting up gender against (bodily) sex in this way recreates a Western tradition of presuming a sharp distinction between social/cultural and biological/natural distinction that cannot be upheld (Scott, 1999: 70–3; Moi, 2001; Young, 2002). This distinction is perceived as ignoring interactions between society and biology, and/or ignoring (bodily) ‘sex’ *per se* – as if ‘the biological’ were merely brute inert matter. Yet there is considerable evidence to indicate that notions of biology do change over time. Julia Epstein has noted, for example, that hermaphrodites were once seen as springing from the devil (Epstein, 1990). On this basis some writers (especially those employing **psychoanalytic** frameworks and/or attending to bodily materiality) prefer to use ‘sex’, ‘sexuality’ or ‘sexual difference’ as the coverall term rather than gender (Grosz, 1994a: 15–17; Mitchell, 1982; Braidotti, 1994b). Moreover, as Jackson points out, the term gender has a decidedly English-speaking heritage. Writers employing English but, for instance, influenced by French theorists like Foucault or Wittig may be less enamoured of the term. Even in the English-speaking world, gender did not become widespread in critical thinking on the topic until the 1970s (Jackson, 1998b: 132).

I have used gender in this book, not because I have any particularly strong commitment to it, but simply because it is the most common term today across the sub-fields of Feminist, Sexuality and Masculinity Studies. This pragmatic usage should not prevent recognition of the ways in which debates about the term gender reveal different understandings of the relationship between biology and the social ordering of sexed identities, as well as the historical/cultural specificity of theoretical names and traditions. The latter point raises another important problem.

Debate 3

Writers who justify the usage of the term ‘gender’ as against ‘sex’ or ‘sexuality’ do so as a means of indicating that the differentiation of men and women is not a simple direct expression of eternal nature. By contrast, those who dispute its usage reject the biological–social division this seems to imply and relatedly refuse to demarcate (bodily) sex, sexuality and gender. Biological (reproductive) sex differences, sexuality (erotic, sometimes reproductive) and gendered social arrangements (typically linked to sex differences and reproduction) are considered interconnected in this analysis. What we see here is also a debate about the *links* between what is described under the terms gender and sexuality. Commentators who reject gender entirely offer one example of theorising which asserts that gendered arrangements and sexuality are bound together, but they are not alone. Most writers in Feminist and Masculinity Studies (that is, in Gender Studies) view gender as intertwined with sexuality (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003: 7). Many go so far as to presume that gender (sexed identities and practices) is the foundation of sexual identities and practices. This approach asserts that gender comes first and that sexuality is subsequently shaped by gender (Jackson, 1995). Most Sexuality Studies writers are unconvinced. Gayle Rubin (1984), for instance, claims that sexuality should be treated separately

from gender and is highly critical of analyses that reduce the former to the latter. Indeed, sexuality theorists in general are much more inclined – along with a relatively small number of Feminist and Masculinity writers – to assert that sexuality is prior to gender.⁷

These disputes, as I noted in the Introduction, indicate that the conception of a field of gender/sexuality theory is not straightforward but also demonstrate points of difference in orientation between the three subfields. Feminist and Masculinity Studies tend to line up together and focus on the significance of gender (sexed identities), while Sexuality Studies focus upon the organisation of desire (not on having or doing sex *per se*, but upon sexualities) and are increasingly somewhat antagonistic to gender approaches.

You can see by looking at the term ‘gender’ that there are ongoing and important debates about it, which also tell us something about other relevant terms. I have drawn attention to three of these debates:

1. The question of whether we should focus on particular (usually marginal) groups/identities (for instance, focus on women rather than gender).
2. The question of the relationship between the social and biological/natural/bodily (which surfaces in considering gender, versus sex/sexuality/sexual difference, as overall term for the field of study of sexed identities).
3. The question of the connection between sex, sexed and sexual, in particular between gender and sexuality.

These debates recur in various incarnations in all of the three subfields of gender/sexuality theory – that is, Feminist, Masculinity and Sexuality Studies. I have drawn attention to them to show how such debates chart out the thematic terrain of the gender/sexuality field. They demonstrate the spread of the field across the continuum of Modernist–Postmodern frameworks, the character of its subfields and the significance of particular writers/writings within it, as well as indicating its simmering tensions. For this reason they also shape the format of this book. I will now show how the term ‘gender’ and debates related to it are played out in relation to the subfield, Feminism.

Introducing Feminism

Feminism is the first of the three subfields to be discussed under the overarching field of gender/sexuality (see Figure I.1 in Introduction). The short overview of this subfield that follows also provides an opportunity to show you *how* I intend to develop the whole book. Looking at Feminism gives me the space to model the format I use to characterise and differentiate between different directions/trajectories in the subfields of the field of gender/sexuality (G/S). In much the same way as I used the specific term ‘gender’ to show something of the broad ‘terrain’ of this field, I shall now employ Feminism as the initial specific exemplar which sets out in the way I intend to explore G/S theory and categorise its main directions.

Throughout the book I consider the G/S field in terms of *five main theoretical directions*, which are distinguished in relation to certain frames of reference and debates. In particular I use the Modernism–Postmodernism continuum of views on

a range of debates (such as those around terms like gender mentioned earlier) as a means to highlight main directions. The overarching continuum and different views on specific debates are related to one another. Views on debates tend to be connected to weaker or stronger versions of Modernism and Postmodernism and hence to positions on the Modernist–Postmodern continuum. Each of the subfields of Feminist, Sexuality and Masculinity Studies have different emphases in relation to the continuum, the debates and the five main directions upon which I focus, but all three subfields may be usefully understood by reference to these elements.

Using Feminism as an exemplary model

Critical stance

Feminism, like the other two subfields of G/S theory, has a critical history. It starts from a critique of the mainstream, of ‘the norm’, of what is taken for granted. This subfield, along with Sexuality and Masculinity Studies, operates not as a mere description or analysis of ‘what is’ as given, but from the point of view of scepticism.⁸ Such a form of thinking starts from the point of view of questioning whether ‘the world *has* to be this way?’, questioning even whether the world *is* as it is said to be. In the case of Feminism its *critical stance* takes the form of a critique of misogyny, the assumption of male superiority and centrality (Beasley, 1999: 4). As Bev Thiele says, feminists consider that ‘social and political theory was, and for the most part still is, written by men, for men and about men’ (Ibid.). Feminism is a critical theory that refuses what it describes as the masculine bias of mainstream Western thinking on the basis that this bias renders women invisible/marginal to understandings of humanity and distorts understandings of men. Feminist commentators offer a critique of the mainstream focus on men insofar as this focus and its limits are not recognised. They note that in Western thought to speak of men is taken as speaking universally (Ibid.: 14 and 8).

This falsely universalised MAN, who is supposed to represent us all, cannot acknowledge its gender specificity, its masculine particularity. As some feminists point out, this has meant that the masculine bias of mainstream thought is ironically sometimes dangerous to men. For example, feminist writers like Dorothy Broom (1996: 24–5) argue that without a focus precisely on the particularities of men’s bodies it is difficult to develop appropriate health services for men. Clearly this orientation indicates that Feminism, as an instance of theorising in the G/S field, *starts* from a critical or questioning position in relation to social arrangements and takes as central the link between sex and power in society.

This means that Feminism is a critical stance that decentres the assumptions of the mainstream in terms of centre (men)–periphery (women). This is also a feature of Sexuality and Masculinity Studies, which similarly decentre notions of the norm in relation to sex and power. Feminism not only decentres the usual assumptions about what is central and what is at the margins, but also shifts the subject of the analysis, in that the notion of woman is placed centre stage (Beasley, 1999: 18–19). This occurs even when feminists question the validity of this sexed identity. Feminists focus, in short, on that which is deemed marginal/peripheral.

At this point there is some parting of the ways between the three subfields of the G/S field. Masculinity Studies offers a critical stance on sex and power but, rather than focusing on the marginalised, attends to those that are traditionally central to Western thinking – that is, men and masculinity. Indeed, while this subfield has become more attentive to diversity, it still primarily attends to white middle-class heterosexual men. By comparison, Sexuality Studies is mostly (like Feminism) concerned with marginalised identities and practices – that is, with LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) and/or ‘Queer’ sexualities. Nevertheless, more recently there has been a growing body of work in Sexuality Studies concerned with heterosexuality, with ‘mainstream’ sexuality.

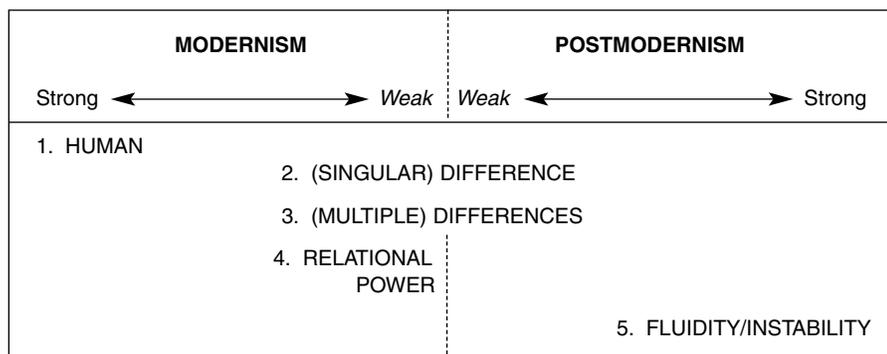
What is important here is that even if the social positioning of the subject matter differs across the three subfields, the critical stance evident in Feminism remains. Critiques of the mainstream using a focus on the mainstream – such as critical analyses of masculinity by looking at the positioning of men – are becoming more common and a more accepted part of the G/S field. This movement towards reconsidering what is deemed the centre rather than the periphery parallels the ways in which Whiteness is now a more explicit subject in critical analyses, decentring the mainstream in relation to ‘race’/ethnicity. All the same, the most usual technique of the G/S field has been, and remains, the decentring of mainstream assumptions regarding sex and power by focusing on the marginal. Why? Because the exclusion of the marginalised has been taken as clearly demonstrating the action of power in relation to sexed and sexual identities/practices.

Whether commentators in the G/S field focus upon the marginal or the mainstream, the intention in all these approaches is not just to be critical but to *challenge the normative hierarchy of sex (sexed and sexual)*. All of the subfields are characterised, in other words, by an inclination to challenge the notion of a proper, appropriate, natural ‘norm’ in relation to gender and sexuality. This central motivation to challenge the status quo has sometimes formed the grounds for disquiet, even rejection, regarding the status of certain writings. Masculinity theorists have been taken to task by feminist thinkers because they have been deemed insufficiently critical. Sexuality commentators have raised similar concerns in relation to Feminism. The existence of such disputes about ‘adequacy’ and ‘belonging’ suggest a shared sense that G/S theory and all of its subfields are committed to social reform, or at least social destabilisation. The subfields show a concern with some level of social change that resists the existing hierarchy of sex and power.

In order to show these critical, decentring and change-oriented characteristics at work, I shall now turn more specifically to the history and debates associated with Feminism as an example.

Content: frames of reference (the continuum of views) and main directions

The field of gender/sexuality theory (and its three subfields, Feminist, Sexuality and Masculinity Studies) may be described in terms of an array of five main theoretical directions spreading across the Modernist–Postmodern continuum (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Map of the gender/sexuality field: continuum and directions

This general map of the G/S field, and the continuum of views within it,⁹ can be contextualised and also clarified by outlining the specific forms these main directions take in Feminism. I will examine Feminism's main directions in brief to set the scene for the more detailed chapters that follow.

1 The Human: Modernist (Emancipatory/Liberationist) feminisms

The so-called 'first wave' of Feminism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was marked by its *critique* of dominant Western thinking of the time, that is, its critique of **Liberalism**. Liberalism during this period proposed a belief in the importance and 'freedom' of the individual, understood in terms of rights or claims to be free as far as possible from intervention by government. All individuals were to be 'free' to make their own way and their own wealth. The social and political rights of supposedly gender-neutral individuals were said to reside in their humanity, in what distinguished them as human, in their ability to **reason**. The ability to reason meant that individuals did not require the paternal hand of the father-figure state. Individuals – reasoning human beings – did not need the assistance of government. However, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Liberalism, though using the gender-neutral language of 'humanity', 'individual' and 'reason', rested in practice upon a notional man and was indeed confined to men.

'First-wave' feminism noted that women were regarded as irrational creatures, were not permitted to vote, own property once married, and had little legal control over their children or their bodies. This form of Feminism advanced a critique of the supposed universality of Liberalism – of its conception of a universal human nature shared by all – by pointing out that women were excluded from this account. However, for the most part first-wave activists did not disagree with Liberalism's idea of a universal standard for social and political rights and selfhood. Instead they noted that the standard was male rather than universal. While some variants of first-wave feminism supported Marxist/Socialist refutations of Liberalism's individualist standard and of Liberal capitalist society, early Liberal feminists advocated the extension of this standard to women to enable women to have access to full adult citizenship within Liberal capitalist society (Tapper, 1986; Corrin, 1999: Chapter 2;

Tong, 1998: Chapter 1; Carver, 1998). Early Liberal feminists proposed women's inclusion in the Liberal universal conception of the *Human*.

By the 'second wave' of Feminism, which began in 1960s and 1970s, there was stronger criticism of this universal standard. Several strands or 'types' of Feminism developed which included not only reworked versions of Liberal and Marxist/Socialist feminism but additionally Radical feminism. There are many accounts of these several types of Feminism, which clarify how they have been characterised (Beasley, 1999: 51–64; Tong, 1998: 10–129; Bryson, 1992, 2003; Donovan, 2000). However, for the moment what is crucial is that all of these strands of Feminism, like first-wave feminism, had an 'emancipatory' orientation. They focused on a compensatory reversal in which masculine bias was exposed and women's theorising and activities were rescued from obscurity (A. Ferguson, 1994). The aim for the most part was to emancipate women from their past neglect and marginalisation, to make women part of the social landscape, to **assimilate** women into society, which would necessarily transform that society. While these second-wave commentators generally criticised the Liberal 'universal' standard more thoroughly than their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sisters, they did not abandon all notions of a universal standard. In this sense these second-wave thinkers are seen as still offering an 'Emancipatory' or *Modernist* approach. It now becomes necessary to outline some features of a Modernist frame of reference in order to explain important aspects of feminist thinking, which will later be relevant to the consideration of Modernist themes in the Sexuality and Masculinity Studies subfields.

Second-wave feminists (like those of the first wave) may be seen as linked to a Modernist frame of reference on a number of grounds. First, all of them conceive of a universalisable truth or mode of analysis that can reveal the key mechanism(s) of all society/societies. This truth is about power and 'oppression'. In discovering the key mechanism/truth about power, the aim is to throw off macro (large-scale) structures of power that oppress women and other subordinated groups. Secondly, power in this model is understood in terms of suppression and dominance, as 'power over' rather than 'power to'. It acts downwards, in a negative fashion to constrict or restrict. Major analytical terms employed by second-wave feminism – like 'patriarchy' and 'compulsory heterosexuality' – indicate the negative nature of power, its quality of repression. Second-wave feminism, from the 1960s and 1970s to today, offers a theory about the truth of power, in particular men's systemic power as a group over women as a group (even if individual men and women might escape this social structuring). Power is owned by the dominant group, as an attribute or property. In short, men *have* power. Thirdly, the aim of this theory is to overthrow power, to overthrow men's authority. The fourth element of this Emancipatory/Modernist form of Feminism involves a particular notion of the self. Instead of accepting the mainstream Liberal universals of the 'individual', 'the human' and 'reason', second-wave feminists expanded and altered them. In Liberal feminism women are included in an extended account of the existing Liberal universal standard of human nature – that is, reason. In Marxist/Socialist and Radical feminisms an alternative, less individualist, less mind-oriented, more co-operative universal human nature, and one less firmly tied to a particular account of competitive masculinity, is generally propounded.

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Most aspects of these several types of Emancipatory feminism are about assimilating women into an enhanced view of the social world, about developing a common political aim around a single theoretical platform. Their largely *assimilationist* stance is concerned with removing barriers to women's full social participation, enabling women to participate and be recognised in the social world as men are. With power peeled away, Emancipatory feminism suggests, women's true free selves will have an opportunity to flower.

Emancipatory feminism, whether of the first or second waves, is called Modernist because it presents several features associated with this term.

1. This form of feminism exhibits a faith in 'metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984)¹⁰ – that is, large-scale macro holistic explanatory accounts which offer notions of a singular central universal 'truth' about society, power and 'human nature'/human-ness.
2. It views power as domination downwards and as the property of the dominant, such that power can be thrown off and society can be made free of power.
3. It conceives the self as repressed/oppressed by social power but having an inner core (universal Human essence) beyond power, which can be emancipated or liberated.

There are equivalent frameworks of Modernist 'emancipatory' or **liberationist** thinking in Masculinity and Sexuality Studies. For this reason we will return to distinctions between Modernist and Postmodern frames of references on several occasions as they indicate ongoing differences between main directions in all of the subfields of the gender/sexuality field.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise, even at this early stage of examining the G/S field, that such distinctions are by no means clear-cut. Some elements of Emancipatory feminism were rather less certain about Modernist general theories of power and society and less certain about a single path or key to social change. The universalist and assimilationist orientation I have outlined, which focused upon a common Human nature as well as a common political action agenda, was a feature of Liberal and Marxist feminisms of the first and second waves. However, this orientation was less straightforwardly embraced by Socialist and Radical feminisms. In the latter strands, general theories and universal conceptions of selfhood were sometimes upheld at the same time as a notion of particular *group identities*. Gender difference was increasingly promoted. In these accounts the focus was more upon *women's difference from men* (rather than a common humanity) and upon affirming women as a group, rather than upon enabling women to enter, participate in and assimilate into a man's world on equal terms. As Elaine Showalter (1985: 249, 260) puts it, feminist approaches evolved from an initial critique of the male-centred character of the universal Human standard towards an increasing celebration of '**gynocentrism**' or women-centred analyses, which emphasised gender difference. The concern with notions of difference led over time into an ever more thoroughgoing rethinking of Modernist general paradigms and a shift towards Postmodernism.¹¹

2 Gender (singular) Difference: Identity Politics to 'Sexual Difference' feminisms

By the late 1970s and 1980s a focus on group difference, on a theorising and politics organised around a singular identity or category – that is, gender – had become

the predominant tendency in Western Feminism. Such a focus identifies difference between the genders as *the* starting point for social analysis. Gender distinctions in this setting mean that women have or are identified with particular experiences at some distance from mainstream, supposedly universal presumptions about the world and what matters in it. Gender Difference feminists argue, like the Emancipatory feminists, that 'universal' presumptions are in fact not neutral but derived from men or notions of the masculine and constitute women as outsiders. However, the former theorists do not attempt to include/assimilate women in a gender-neutral universal Human standard in which men and women are 'the same'. Rather they speak for an alternative worldview which recognises and highlights difference, specifically gender difference. Some examples of gender difference (or sexual difference) writers include Mary Daly (Radical feminist), Nancy Chodorow (psychoanalytic Socialist feminist), Carol Gilligan (moral philosopher), and Luce Irigaray (psychoanalytic Postmodern 'French feminist'). It is evident from this short list that this singular focus on gender difference (rather than several differences) spans Modernist and Postmodern approaches. I employ the terms '**Identity Politics**' and '**Sexual Difference**' respectively to distinguish these frames of reference.

The aim of the Gender Difference framework in Feminism was, rather than attempting to locate the marginalised (women in this case) at the edges of existing society, to acknowledge difference positively. Such a concern involves reversing the traditional hierarchy of social privilege by revaluing the marginal. Indeed Difference theorising involves privileging the marginalised, at least strategically. In Feminism this has meant 'revaluing the Feminine' (A. Ferguson, 1994; see also Phoca, 2000). Rather than an all-embracing theory of social organisation and human nature, such thinking tends towards an at least bifurcated account of different social and cultural positionings. In the Modernist 'Identity Politics' versions of Gender Difference, this amounts to asserting differently constructed gender identities and experiences and mounting political platforms based upon the specific positioning of women. The 'women-centred' focus of this Identity Politics is seen as necessary given women's difference from men and as an antidote to the **androcentric** nature of existing society. Few feminists promoting this woman-centred Identity Politics argue that men and women are naturally intrinsically different, though sometimes the analysis runs close to this.

In the more Postmodern inflected versions of Gender Difference thinking – often termed 'Sexual Difference' thinking – there is a marked refusal of any particular content to gender identities like 'women'. 'Sexual Difference' theorists do not assume that women necessarily have any particular qualities that can be contrasted with those of men. Instead, Sexual Difference feminists revalue the Feminine as representing in cultural terms 'difference' from the (masculine) norm. The norm – what is deemed to be 'universal' rather than the merely particular – is associated with the Masculine. Gender (Feminine and Masculine) is here not so much about the actual characteristics of men and women as the exemplary symbolic register for power and hierarchy in society. It is the symbolic billboard for Western cultural insistence that differences between people must be conceived as expressing an intrinsically hierarchical order, that differences must be understood as normal/superior or abnormal/inferior and not as diversity. In revaluing the Feminine as having an autonomous potential and not merely as the other (lesser) half of the Masculine, in conceiving the Feminine as offering a vision beyond hierarchy, Sexual Difference theorists reinterpret

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it as the means to envisage plurality in society (Gross (now publishes as Grosz), 1986: 204). While Feminist Identity Politics and Sexual Difference approaches depart in their assessment of the meaning of the category women/feminine, they share certain features. They offer Modernist and Postmodern variants on the common theme of the incommensurability of the sexes and the importance of celebrating rather than suppressing difference in social life (Grosz, 1994a: 8–9).

This 'Difference' framework has equivalents in Sexuality and to a lesser extent Masculinity Studies. In the case of Sexuality theorising, for example, lesbian/gay studies strongly focus on marginal group identities and on the difference between homo and hetero sexualities. Difference theorists in the Sexuality subfield also offer an anti-assimilationist political agenda that refuses to accommodate to the assumptions of mainstream heterosexual society, and validates difference from that mainstream. Because commentators in the subfield of Masculinity Studies are committed to critical examination of dominant rather than marginal social identities, the typical stress in Gender Difference on revaluing different identities or social positionings has necessarily taken another path in Masculinity thinking from its deployment in Feminist and Sexuality theorising. While Masculinity writers have sometimes followed feminist Gender Difference models to stress women's particular world views or positioning, their agenda has largely disallowed any form of Identity Politics based on manhood or masculinity. These writers decidedly do not conceive their critical approaches as implicated in the validation of Masculinity's 'difference' – that is, its dominance.

Within Feminism the Gender Difference approach includes Radical, Socialist and Psychoanalytic feminisms. All of them contain some clearly Modernist universal elements regarding the aim of developing a singular macro account organised around a singular conception of 'difference' explaining the truth of power. Nevertheless, they do not all view power in Modernist terms as merely negative repression. Moreover, the account of the self or identity in Gender Difference feminism is not straightforwardly Modernist. Identity, in this analysis, is conceived as more than singular and not universally the same. It is marked by group difference (gender difference). Feminist Gender Difference writers are distinctly Modernist overall, but in some instances they can be seen as at the 'border' of the Modernist/Postmodern 'divide', situated on the Postmodern 'side' but drawing upon both paradigms. This border positioning is especially evident in the case of some psychoanalytic feminist work (Beasley, 1999: 74–7).

3 (Multiple) differences: 'race'/ethnicity/imperialism and feminism¹²

This theoretical framework provides one of the several feminist counter-arguments challenging Gender Difference. It is found right across the spectrum of the Modernist–Postmodern continuum. However, in recent times feminist writings which focus upon the arenas of 'race', ethnicity and imperialism (REI) typically cluster around the middle, on both sides of the dividing point of the continuum. For example, they have had a limited presence, though often an important one, in strongly Modernist Emancipatory feminisms. Their presence is most evident in the Marxist/Socialist tradition. Additionally, feminists dealing with race/ethnicity/imperialism are often suspicious of firmly Postmodern positions and, if they do adopt a Postmodern framework at all, tend to adopt modified versions. They often retain a more negative account of

power usually associated with Modernism and are generally less inclined to disavow identity categories (like 'black woman') as a crucial site of political thinking.

Feminists attending to race/ethnicity/imperialism have a voice in both group Difference and 'Social Constructionist' camps, sometimes simultaneously. Such feminists may wish to revalue and affirm group (racial/ethnic minority/'Third World') difference and identities. On the other hand, they also criticise *singular* group difference approaches that only emphasise gender/sexual difference. REI feminists assert that a focus on singular gender difference involves suppressing other differences and maintaining an **essentialist** account of men and women as unified groups without acknowledgement that 'racial'/ethnic/cultural location might sharply alter any generalised assumptions about the relative power of these groups. In short, the masculinity of Aboriginal Australian men is likely to be an overly narrow and partial descriptor of their social positioning. Categories of men and women cannot be seen, in this REI framework, as self-evident identities that are always the same and bear the same social consequences everywhere. This position has links with or overlaps with Social Constructionist criticisms of Gender Difference.

4 Relational Power: Feminist Social Constructionism

'Social Constructionist' or 'materialist' feminists strongly rejected the Gender Difference position that became significant in the 1980s. Social Constructionists argue that 'difference' does not adhere *in* the self/identity, is not an inherent essence, but is created by relations of power (Jackson and Scott, 1996: 11–12). They insist that the emphasis on gender or sexual difference is unhelpful and that people are not marginalised because they are different but made different by marginalisation. These feminists can be located on the Modernist 'side' of Modernist/Postmodern border on grounds similar to those used by the greater number of 'Difference' feminists. Social Constructionist approaches describe truth and power in universal macro terms and power is largely perceived as negative domination. On the other hand, this largely Modernist perspective is somewhat unsettled by an equivocal view of human essence. Social Constructionist theorists largely reject Modernism's humanist emphasis on a pre-existing inner core to the self. Rather, they assert, identities are made and made different by the social structuring effects of power.

Social Constructionism, along with Postmodernism, offers a critique of both Emancipatory and Gender Difference approaches in that both of the latter accounts stress relatively fixed notions of identity. Social constructionism criticises inherent or fixed notions of either 'the human' or group identities (for instance, lesbian, man) as 'essentialism', as supporting a notion of an original inner essence or core to the self. On the same basis, gay and lesbian 'difference' approaches within Feminist and Sexuality Studies are also criticised as developing overly narrow and romantic accounts of 'the lesbian' or 'the gay man'. On the other hand, Social Constructionism, with its emphasis on socially and historically concrete studies, continues to pay attention to identity categories. Unlike strongly Postmodern approaches, this theoretical direction acknowledges the potential stability of such categories over time and does not demand their disavowal. In Feminism, Social Constructionism draws for the most part upon Modernist Marxist/Socialist and Radical feminisms, but some writers within it show an increasing awareness of Postmodern theorising. This brief account

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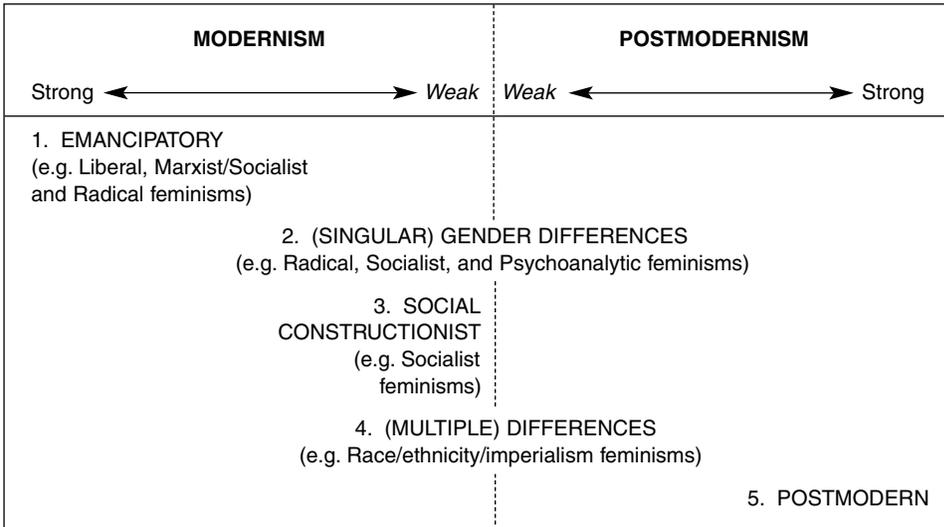
of Social Constructionism is discussed in more detail in Chapters 8 and 12 (see also Burr, 1995: 1–16).

5 Fluidity/Instability: Postmodern feminism

Lastly, we come to Postmodern feminism. This is arguably the predominant feminist position in the 1990s and 2000s. Postmodern feminism offers, among other things, a multiplication of the notion of difference that appears in the group difference(s) approaches. In this theoretical trajectory there is an expansion of difference towards differences, towards a plurality that resists any set identities. Postmodern feminists do not aim to include women in the existing opportunities of a male world or broadening the male world into an expanded range of possibilities that can include women (the Emancipatory model). Nor do they wish to reverse the traditional hierarchy and focus on women/the feminine (the Gender/Sexual Difference model). Rather, Postmodern feminists intend to destabilise the very conception of identity (human or group) and the binary identities (such as men and women) upon which the two former strategies rest. Writers like Butler and Sedgwick question speaking as a woman, or for women, and instead emphasise differences between and within us all. The concern with Differences that is characteristic of REI frameworks is here extended to the point where the issue is not multiple categories of difference but a movement beyond such categories of analysis which questions their very status. Some writers attending to REI may draw upon and be described as ‘postmodern’ thinkers (for example, ‘post-colonial’ writers such as Gayatri Spivak). However, my use of the term Postmodern feminism is intended to convey a strong version of Postmodernism which disavows notions of identity in ways that are at odds with the commitments of REI theorising.

In similar fashion, Postmodern feminism in this usage represents a particularly thoroughgoing version of Social Constructionism. Where the Social Constructionist approach rejects overly fixed or inherent conceptions of identity in favour of a focus on the socio-historical constitution of identities, the emphasis of Postmodern feminism is to assert that there is no ‘truth’ behind identity. While Social Constructionism has not abandoned a conception of social humanity or an account of human agency which interacts with social requirements, Postmodern frameworks conceive humans as no more or less than a social product organised by power. Gender, for example, is an obligatory masquerade. There is nothing behind or before this ‘mask’. Postmodern feminism is strongly anti-essentialist. In this form of feminist thinking there is no prior or authentic true self underneath power. Power creates multiple, fragmented selves and power itself is not a singular process. It is multiple, local (capillary) and productive in its operations. Such a viewpoint stands in contrast to Modernist conceptions of power as a monolithic macro and repressive action from above. Postmodern feminism, in short, is an anti-generalist, anti-humanist (antagonistic to the notion of a common core Human nature or agency) and strongly anti-essentialist position (Ahmed, 1996; Sullivan, 2003: 39–43; Milner and Browitt, 2002: 164–202; Beilharz, 1994: 7–22 and 2001: 173–87; Turner, 1997: 117–33; Best and Kellner, 1997; Rudel and Gerson, 1999).

While other feminist approaches may be regarded as postmodern or seen as influenced by postmodern theorising, I have deliberately chosen to capitalise Postmodern feminism to distinguish those writers who display an unequivocal Postmodern

Figure 1.2 Map of Modernism–Postmodernism continuum example: Feminism

stance and see this as *the* characteristic of their work. Such distinctly Postmodern views are even more strongly taken up in Sexuality Studies than in Feminism, but have so far had limited impact on Masculinity Studies. What I have delineated as Postmodernism might be labelled ‘Poststructuralism’ in other texts. The terms are often used interchangeably.¹³

It is important to note at this point that the distinction between Modernist and Postmodern frames of reference within Feminism, as well as in Masculinity and Sexuality Studies, is only broadly sketched out in this chapter. It will be further developed and contextualised in later chapters (for example, Chapter 5), especially in those which deal with individual theorists. As is often the case with such broad and complex terms, the range of their meanings is frequently better captured by considering their specific uses in particular writings. Moreover, since this is a book about the field of gender/sexuality theory and its writers, its scope precludes a lengthy, in-depth focus on the various interpretations of the terms Modernism and Postmodernism. Those readers who wish to consider the terms in greater detail can find many helpful sources in the notes for this and other chapters.¹⁴

Contextualising the G/S field by looking at Feminism

Having outlined the five main directions in Feminism we can now begin to contextualise the earlier schematic map of the whole gender/sexuality field. The five main directions outlined in relation to the broader field have specific forms when we look at the example of Feminism. These specific forms are similar to those found in the other two subfields of Masculinity and Sexuality Studies.

As I discuss the two other subfields, the maps of the Modernist–Postmodern continuum in the G/S field overall (Figure 1.1) and specifically in Feminism (Figure 1.2) will be reiterated in various ways. The debates related to this continuum will become increasingly clear as they are fleshed out in discussion of the work of different writers.

Notes

1. Many characterisations of the term ‘gender’ simply assume that the social setting is Western. Despite the limits of a label like ‘the West’, which does not acknowledge the permeability between Western and non-Western cultures as well as the non-homogeneous nature of the West, it seems to me that it remains important to acknowledge the specificity of the cultural assumptions in definitions. In a book that concentrates upon theorising in the English-speaking world, this appears all the more necessary.

2. See Connell’s view of the reproductive character of gender in Connell (2002: 10) by contrast with Mary Hawkesworth’s (1997a: 3) critique of this.

3. See for criticism of this limitation, Hawkesworth (1997b).

4. Some commentators have suggested that the term has problems beyond those I discuss in this chapter, and draw attention to what they see as its decided limits. Hawkesworth (1997a) argues that ‘gender’ has mistakenly been employed too broadly – for example as a means to explain rather than merely describe social phenomena – whereas Moi (2001) asserts that it has outworn its strategic usefulness. See also Scott (1999).

5. For an example of the continuing force of this debate, see interchanges in ‘Beyond sex and gender: the future of women’s studies’, in *Feminist Theory*, 4:3, 2003 (contributors include M. Zaleswski, M. Lloyd, E. Rooney, M. Hill, P. Clough and W. Brown).

6. See, for example, Jackson (1996b: 62–73) on gender, Social Constructionism and female sexuality and Weeks’s (1985: 108–20, 246–50) account of Social Constructionism as a means to offer a critique of *sociobiology*.

7. For an example of a Gender Studies viewpoint which posits sexuality as prior to gender, see MacKinnon (1982).

8. Meaghan Morris (1993: 300), for example, says that Feminism is ‘minimally, a movement of discontent with the everyday and with wide-eyed definitions of the everyday as “the way things are”’.

9. I have employed an account of weak and stronger Modernist and Postmodern theories in the continuum. There are many other writers who discuss degrees of Modernism/Postmodernism (for example, Waugh, 1998).

10. Jean-François Lyotard (1984) associates Modernism with large-scale accounts of history and societal macro structures – that is, what he calls ‘metanarratives’. Others use terms like ‘master narratives’ (see Milner and Browitt, 2002: 175–7; and Andermahr et al., 2000: 170–1, 207–11).

11. It should also be pointed out that the distinction between Modernist and Postmodern frames of reference is not as sharp as this preliminary account suggests. I have described them at this point as sharply differentiated to highlight general positionings. As you, the reader, move through the chapters, more contextual detail and related ambiguity is introduced that reveals the distinction as a complex continuum rather than a divide. (See also this chapter, note 9 and Chapter 2, note 6.)

12. The terminologies employed here will be clarified and discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

13. Postmodernism is typically used as a more portmanteau and inclusive term, while Poststructuralism is perhaps more likely to be linked to a more specific intellectual field. For this reason I find the former is a better umbrella term for a general intellectual phenomenon. Some

commentators have been inclined to distinguish between Postmodern and Poststructuralist thinking and tend to view them as separate lines of analysis. For instance, Milner and Browitt – perhaps because of their central focus on culture – link the former with an attempt to define the new postmodern cultural condition of our times, while associating the latter with language, ‘difference theory’ and analysis of modernism’s passing. I am less inclined to stress a divide between Postmodernism and Poststructuralism. Like Best and Kellner among others, I emphasise interconnections between these terminologies in terms of social theorising. I would also reiterate that in the gender/sexuality field, and elsewhere, the actual usage of the terms as equivalents makes it difficult to maintain a notion of their separation. See Beasley, 1999: 81–96; Milner and Browitt, 2002: 170; Best and Kellner, 1991: 25–33.

14. There are numerous existing sources that may be useful for those wishing to understand the complexity of the terms Modernism and Postmodernism. You may find it useful to check the notes for Chapter 5 in particular, but meantime here are three references: Gibbins and Reimer, 1999; Natoli and Hutcheon, 1993, especially section 1; Milner, 1991.