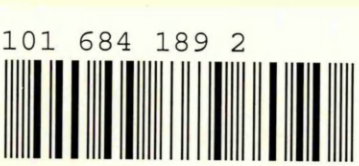

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The Discursive Maintenance of Gender Inequality: Analyses of Student and Internet Discussions

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to a relatively small but burgeoning body of feminist and critical discourse analytic research into the social construction of gender and gender inequality conducted within critical social psychology. It begins by critically discussing the various theories of gender within the discipline. The thesis is an explicitly political endeavour. As is discussed, all work is political even if it fails to acknowledge this. This research aims to be openly reflexive about its ideological underpinnings and the historical and cultural climate in which the work emerges. Feminist theories of gender are also critically discussed. Having explored the various theories of gender and their relative de/merits, the adopted feminist social constructionist approach is explicated. Such an approach addresses the main failings of other approaches which are variously centred around, for example, inattention to power, language, multiplicity of identities and genders, essentialism, self-contained individualism and the historical, cultural and contextual relativity of meaning. These issues are explicitly attended to through the chosen methodology of critical discourse analysis.

Three studies were carried out. All utilise the same analytical methodology but vary in terms of context, focus and data collection method. The first study analyses the interview talk of male psychology undergraduates at a northern English university. The men were found to present themselves, and men generally, as 'victims'. The second study aims to address a wide-scale problem in social constructionist work on gender which also afflicts the first study presented here. Whilst theory has shifted away from essentialism, both theoretical and empirical work continues to promote an implicit essentialism by assuming that the biological sex of participants should correspond to the gender of interest (e.g. studying 'men and masculinity'). The second study includes both male and female volunteer interviewees from a similar sample population as the first study. Both sexes were found to be bolstering inequality by constructing a picture of equality between the sexes. This was achieved through three repertoires. One overtly constructed 'equality as imminent/achieved'. Another, the 'women as oppressors/men as victims' repertoire, presents instances of women's capability of inverting men's general power. The third, 'women as manipulators', was only utilised by the women and suggests women have a more covert power which counterbalances men's overt power.

This greater focus on discourses and shift away from essentialism, evidenced in the diminished interest given to embodiment and identity, is more fully embraced in the third study which concentrates on an internet discussion board. In this context, embodiment and identity cannot be known with confidence. The discussion board contributors construct men and women as internally homogeneous and oppositional groups. Two repertoires are discussed: 'communication difficulties' and 'the spokesperson'. Men and women are said to find communication between them incredibly difficult. Contradictorily, men and women are solicited for, or take it upon themselves to offer, 'insider' views on their particular sex group. Taken together, the three studies therefore represent quite different contexts, samples, and methodological approaches to the problem of the net inequality between the sexes, and contribute to a growing body of research on how inequality is maintained through linguistic practice in particular contexts.

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Most of all, thanks to Karen, a true partner and ceaseless believer: someone who, at various points, wanted to travel the world but waited, wanted to move in pursuit of a career or a band but selflessly settled, wanted some of the time I afforded my books and computer but got 'in a minute', wanted fun but got 'not now', wanted so little and received even less. It is not without a sense of guilt and contradiction that I pursued feminist research, whilst, it could be argued, expecting a dutiful partner who put my needs first. It could so easily have been the other way around. In one way or another, no doubt one day it will.

Contents

Preface

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first two chapters serve both as an introduction to the thesis and to locate it within a theoretical framework. Chapter 1 begins with a broad overview of theories of gender that have been influential in social psychology. The chapter serves to position the chosen social constructionist approach in relation to the critique of these alternatives. Chapter 2 examines feminist theories of gender. Again, by way of critique, it serves to position the thesis, this time in terms of overtly politically motivated critical theory. Having toured and critiqued psychological and feminist theories of gender, Chapter 2 arrives at the chosen social constructionist approach. It is argued that this approach offers both a strong theoretical base and a means of moving towards change of power inequalities between the sexes. Empirical work is given fuller attention in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 as it relates to the various contexts and aims of the individual studies. Chapter 2 ends by considering the current political climate as it relates to gender and feminism in the UK and USA.

Chapter 3 begins by outlining some of the analytical methods on offer to those studying language and gender (the data collection method of each study is discussed in individual study chapters - 4.2, 5.2 and 6.2). These are critiqued and point to the discourse analytic tradition as being most appropriate. Before considering the chosen methodology of discourse analysis, some of the approaches to ideology are discussed. The critique of these traditions contextualises the kind of ideological critique that is applied to the data obtained in the three studies. It also points to a particular formulation of discourse analysis amongst the methodological alternatives on offer. The chapter ends by looking at the concept of reflexivity. Reflexivity is built into the thesis throughout and this section points to some of the places it may be found. A very important reflexive issue for the male researcher in feminism is his relationship with this politics and his subject matter and participants. The final section deals specifically with this issue.

The following three chapters document the three empirical studies carried out. Although gender research generally has to take into account both masculinity and

femininity because the two are constructed in opposition, Chapter 4 concentrates primarily on masculinities. The study aims to contribute to a small but growing body of feminist and social constructionist work in the arena of masculinities in higher education by examining talk within three all-male undergraduate psychology student discussion groups. The recorded talk was transcribed and subjected to a critical discourse analysis. The findings are analysed in terms of the ideological significance of the talk as it relates to the current backlash against feminism and changes to traditional masculinities.

Chapter 5 also documents the study of undergraduate psychology students in a similar context, but focuses on the hitherto unexplored area of women's constructions of masculinities, and particularly, on how change is thwarted by various constructions of an alleged equality between men and women. This study represents a radical move away from the implied 'essentialism' of work in this field, i.e. the idea that men and women are two separate but internally homogeneous and predictable groups. Whilst the essentialist torch burns much less brightly in social constructionism, the embers continue to rekindle from time to time as evidenced in sex-specific participant selection. Consequently, men and women are analysed in parallel using critical discourse analysis. The ideological functions of the talk is analysed as it relates to the post-feminist culture of the time and the anti-feminist backlash.

Chapter 6 shifts focus contextually and also moves from speech to written text. The study documented here involved a covert collection of textual contributions to an internet discussion board. The board is primarily aimed at women but men also contribute. It has some important advantages over interview method, but also some disadvantages, mostly centring on the absence of a researcher. The study builds on the shift of emphasis in Chapter 5 away from identities as a point of departure for research (e.g. for participant selection) and more fully toward the performativity of language. The internet is a relatively neglected domain for this kind of research and more fully tests the change of emphasis away from identity politics because identities cannot easily be deciphered with confidence on discussion boards, especially in a covert study. The study is more inclusive in terms of sampling than the first two studies, but instead of assuming difference and studying an increased number of identity permutations, it looks to similarity, taking language as a primary interest. The researcher does not therefore

become complicit in unnecessarily reproducing an assumed essential difference through participant selection or prior analytical assumptions. A critical discourse analysis was performed on the data. The analysis shifts the focus more thoroughly back to gender following the second study's concentration on participants views on in/equality between the sexes. The ideological functions of the repertoires are discussed.

The study chapters are summarised and discussed together in Chapter 7 (7.1) and possible future directions explored. Future directions for research are also explored as they relate to the digital revolution currently sweeping western industrialised culture. The final section of the chapter examines reflexive issues that are not overtly attended to elsewhere in the thesis.

1 Psychological Theories of Gender

1.1 Introduction

The first chapter looks at some of the theories of gender that have been used in psychology and related disciplines. The aim is not to provide an exhaustive taxonomy, or to suggest there is no overlap between approaches, but rather, to contextualise the present research within the broader framework of gender research generally, and further, to justify the social constructionist theoretical approach taken, through critique of the alternatives. A broad overview is given here before going on to look at the individual theories on offer. This should serve to briefly contextualise the discipline of psychology as well as to succinctly locate the critical stance taken with respect to the various theories (this is discussed in more detail in sections 2.8 - 2.11). A broad look at the historical and cultural climate in which the psychological disciplines emerged is offered first.

The psychological disciplines emerged and flourished within what is often referred to in the social sciences as 'modernity', a modern age, sometimes referred to as 'the Enlightenment', which began around 1770. During the Enlightenment, western societies went through revolutionary changes marked by 'progress'. On a general scale, society rapidly shifted from agricultural economies to industrialisation, superstition to rationality, and religion to science (Giddens, 1997). The psychological disciplines, which emerged in the latter two decades of the nineteenth century, generally drew upon positivist scientific methodologies which had proved successful in the natural sciences such as biology, chemistry and physics, claimed its methods were objective, and professed an ability to tap into a real world that exists beyond the concepts used to describe and analyse it (realism). Largely through these claims to rigour, reason, objectivity, searches for truth, and the insights and explanations of individual behaviour, the psychological sciences gained a position of authority which they continue to enjoy today (Feyerabend, 1987; Rose, 1989; see also various chapters, e.g. by Parker, and Wilkinson, in Ibáñez and Íñiguez, 1997). Psychology also drew upon the empiricist tradition, that is, the idea that the senses provide the best source for knowledge about

the world. Much of the work in psychology has therefore involved experimental methodology to test hypotheses about the world and to search for and measure things in an 'objective' manner, that is, without the 'polluting' biases of the researcher's values, and furthermore, independent of the historical and cultural context in which the research emerges.

Since the Enlightenment, technology and engineering have increasingly led to control of nature, for example, improved agricultural practices and manufacturing of goods from raw materials. Such advances in engineering were mirrored in the social sciences, particularly in psychology, and more particularly social psychology, giving rise to what Stainton Rogers, Stenner, Gleeson, and Stainton Rogers (1995) call 'humaneering', that is, attempts to manipulate and control individual mind and behaviour, for example, through the psychiatric professions, and attempts to shape social life more generally. Clearly, with such vested interests, and so little attention to the historical and cultural context of research, psychology cannot be value-neutral.

Psychology has also focused on the self-contained individual (Sampson, 1989, 1990), that is, the idea that human behaviour can be satisfactorily explained by looking at atomic individual behaviour or looking within individual embodiment for causes. Mental illness, sexuality and gender, for example, have been seen as 'essences', that reside within individual embodiment. A recurring (social constructionist, feminist, and critical psychological) critical theme regarding psychological approaches to gender is that of 'essentialism'. Essentialism refers to the notion that a construct such as 'gender' exists as a coherent 'thing' or reality independent of the language used to describe it, often requiring only a single explanation, and is stubborn and difficult to change. Gender will often, for example, be seen as something that can be measured. Such measurements are frequently seen as requiring a 'deep' grounding explanation. So, for example, the psychometric approaches (1.3) will often draw upon biology (1.2) to offer causal explanations. Other deep explanations are sought in Freudian psychoanalysis (1.6.1), where gender is also tied to biology but also grounded in the deep structures of the unconscious. Similarly, the cognitive approaches have sought to explain gender through theorising the individual mind (1.4).

Of course, essentialist approaches have not necessarily remained at the level of individual psychology to explain gender. Many, for example, sociobiology (1.2), Freudian psychoanalysis (1.6.1), Lacanian psychoanalysis (1.6.2), and social learning approaches (1.5) have turned, at least in part, to social factors. From a critical social psychological perspective, however, the turn to the social has been incomplete and often, as with sociobiology, is a token gesture which disguises an ongoing concern with individual essences. From a feminist social constructionist perspective, such essentialist and self-contained individualist work leaves little scope for change. In addition to the stubbornness of gender, should it be seen as grounded in the unchanging inevitabilities of biology or the deep psychic structures, many of the psychological theories of gender, for example, some cognitive approaches (1.4), social learning approaches (1.5) and psychoanalysis (1.6), also suggest gender is formed during childhood while the child is relatively impressionable, thus leaving little room for later social influences.

For some theorists, such as Baudrillard (1994) and Lyotard (1990), the developed world has entered a new era of 'postmodernity', which is characterised, for example, by a shrinking world of mass communications and media images that saturate our lives to the extent we can no longer separate reality and virtual reality (Roiser, 1997). There is increasing recognition that we cannot find 'truths' and 'facts' about a 'real world' which lies waiting to be 'discovered' and measured if only we can find the right theoretical and methodological instruments. The universalising grand narratives of Marx and Freud, for example, cannot account for multiplicity and local variation and do not take into account the way in which discourses (2.10) construct reality.

The 'post-' paradigms, discussed in Chapter 2, have marked a shift away from positivist and empiricist methodologies. During the 1970s there was what Stainton Rogers *et al.* (1995) (see also Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001) refer to as a 'climate of perturbation', where many psychologists, especially critical and feminist social psychologists, became increasingly disillusioned with traditional methods and sought qualitative alternatives which would provide a framework for working with, rather than masking, the values and orientations of the researcher as well as aiming towards democratising the research process. The 'traditional' approaches continued to comprise the largest share of research (and research funding, credibility, etc.) but for

many psychologists and feminists the empiricist idea that the senses necessarily, or sufficiently, provide an adequate filter for understanding the world was seen as inadequate at best, and at worst, part of an institutional machine that reproduced an oppressive status quo (Rose, 1989). For example, feminist and other critical thinkers required analyses of 'power', 'ideology' and 'discourses', all of which cannot be directly sensed, in order to challenge the oppression of, better serve, and increase the voice of, women, the working classes, people of colour, the elderly, children, the 'disabled', those who do not meet heterosexual norms, and 'Others' (2.7) in a society that marginalises, ignores, silences, or ostracises them.

Postmodern societal changes are marked by fragmentation and multiplicity, as has been observed, for example, in terms of class (Pakulski and Waters, 1996), and of particular relevance here, of course, gender (Connell, 1987, 1995; Spelman, 1990; Hollway, 1994; Pease, 2000). Whether or not we have entered a period of postmodernity is a hotly contested issue (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Roiser, 1997). What has become increasingly clear, however, is that whether the social world is postmodern or not, 'traditional' notions of class, gender, sexuality, etc. are coming under scrutiny for being overly simplistic theoretical constructs. The poststructuralist, postmodernist and social constructionist theories that attend to this multiplicity and fragmentation and which give due attention to language, power and ideology are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. This chapter takes a critical look at the 'traditional' psychological theories of gender.

1.2 Biological Approaches

The influence of the biological approach has been pervasive in psychology (Stainton Rogers, *et al.*, 1995) and it can be seen in other approaches such as Freudian psychodynamic theory (1.6.1). Some time is spent on it here since it introduces a number of concepts that will repeatedly appear in critiques of other approaches. This section takes a critical look at chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical approaches before considering sociobiology. Genetically, individuals possessing XX chromosomes are defined as female and those possessing XY chromosomes are defined as male.

Those individuals with the XX genotype will be expected to be phenotypically (outwardly) characterised by, for example, a vagina and breasts and a rounded body shape. Those with the XY genotype will be expected to have a penis and a more muscular body. These differences and others are often taken as a basis for other differences such as hormonal differences and consequent differences in behaviour between males and females, for example, greater male aggression and dominance and nurturancy and submissiveness in females (Goldberg, 1977).

There are a number of interrelated problems with these biological approaches such as normative and simplistic categorisation and incorrect and potentially damaging conclusions regarding causation within the individual. Further problems are the essentialism of the approach and the sidelining of the influence of power and culture on gender (e.g. Price and Shildrick, 1999). The problem of assuming two distinct and mutually exclusive categories is pervasive and belies a) a great deal of overlap between them and b) that there are multiple categories.

Leakiness and overlap between categories may be seen, for example, in the observation that whilst biologists and the general public speak of so-called 'sex' hormones, 'male' and 'female' hormones are in fact present in both men and women, albeit in different proportions. Whilst on *average* men have around ten times the concentration of testosterone compared to women, for example, this often distracts from the fact that many women have higher concentrations than many men (Fausto-Sterling, 1985). Birke (1992) examined biological studies of sex difference and found that a great deal of misrepresentation is occurring. Although tests for difference show *average* differences, this has formed the basis for arguing that men and women are separate but internally homogeneous groups. Significant differences are often found between 'average' men and 'average' women but this belies the great deal of individual difference and overlap in distribution curves between men and women in terms of height, musculature, genitalia, hormones, chromosomes, etc. Regarding multiplicity of categories, some individuals have XX chromosomes but externally 'male'-looking genitalia, or have 'extra' or 'missing' chromosomes, e.g. XXX, XXY, XYY or X alone (Edley and Wetherell, 1995).

Inappropriate, misleading, and politically damaging (ab)uses of notions around causation have led, for example, from the observation that many women are nurturant to the explanation that this is 'caused' by hormones. Rossi (1977) argues, for example, based on the observation that the 'female' hormone oxytocin makes a woman's nipples erect prior to breast feeding, that women are therefore more nurturant. As Sayers (1982) argues, it is a very curious leap from erect nipples to life-long expectations of child-rearing. Of course, correlative evidence only tells us that two phenomena occur together. It does not indicate cause and certainly does not suggest a direction for cause. Remaining within the scientific schema, it is also quite possible that it is the playing out of aggression or nurturancy as lived experience that affects hormone levels, that is, the line of causation could be reversed (Kemper, 1990).

The biological approaches paint a rather static, inevitable and unchanging picture of gender as grounded in foundational givens that are beyond individual agency and social change (Edley and Wetherell, 1995). Also, and in relation to this, they are based on a notion of self-contained individualism, that is, the idea that gender can be found within a person's embodiment; that it is an essence waiting to be discovered, measured, and so on (Connell, 1987; 1995). Yet many of the differences are not as static as represented and vary according to non-biological factors such as exercise and medication, and also vary over an individual's lifetime (Birke, 1992).

Intimately bound up with this critique of essentialism and self-contained individualism is the alternative focus on social forces, culture, agency and power. For example, if in a given culture women are forced through sexist recruitment practices or social pressures into work such as typing and men into lifting machinery, it is unsurprising that we should find average differences in muscle mass. Grounding gendered behaviour in essences within the self-contained individual also ignores how it is culturally enacted between people along culturally prescribed and differentially rewarded lines (Connell, 1987). In many cultures it is socially acceptable, even desirable, for men to be aggressive and women to be nurturant. Regardless of the hormonal, genetic or anatomical make-up of a man, he is expected in western cultures not to be too passive, and a women, regardless of her biological make-up, is expected not to be aggressive. By locating gender in the unchanging inevitabilities of genes and

hormones, the approach erases individual agency and therefore individual accountability. If, for example, aggressiveness is said to be determined by chromosomes or particular genes on them, or by 'male' hormones, it is only a small step to arguing that the individual has no self-determination and control over their biology and therefore little or no control over their behaviour, thus excusing and legitimising aggression and related expressions of power such as rape (Brittan and Maynard, 1984).

The treatment of anatomy in biology and within dominant discourses in the medical sciences is problematic too. The medical 'treatment' of 'intersex' 'patients' is a case in point (Kessler, 1994). Normative categorisation problematises individuals who have genitalia that cannot easily be identified as 'male' or 'female', demonstrating the importance of biological categorisation and anxiety over 'abnormalities'. Physicians insist that the individual must be either male or female. As poststructuralists point out (2.10), this is one of many binary oppositions that shape western thinking. The intersexed infant must be either/or. There is no room for the intersexed infant to be both-and, that is, both male and female, or to occupy another category, or indeed, not to be categorised at all. An intersexed infant is seen as abnormal, not just in the sense of being statistically rarer, but in the sense that they are also 'unacceptable' and therefore in need of being reshaped, moulded, mutilated, brought into line, and forced through surgery into a socially acceptable western category (Kessler, 1994).

Genetic, hormonal and other factors may be used to assign the individual to their 'natural' sex (as if they are not already 'natural' - Stainton Rogers, *et. al.*, 1995). However, anatomy often overrides these other biological observations. A dominant discourse in the medical profession is to decide whether the infant has a sufficiently sized penis to warrant corrective surgery and hormonal inducement (Kessler, 1994). 'Maleness' often rests upon the individual's anatomical response to the attempts to enlarge the penis, with success relying upon the penis achieving a size considered acceptable for heterosexual sex. The dominant androcentric and heterosexist discourses are exemplified by the observation that what could easily be construed as an enlarged clitoris is often seen instead as a small penis (Kessler, 1994).

Furthermore, according to Kessler (1994), who interviewed expert physicians, individuals assigned as females and requiring clitoral reduction undergo surgery between age 1 to 4 because of a fear that later on they would suffer traumatic psychological problems should they remember being castrated. Individuals assigned as females and requiring vaginal reconstruction, on the other hand, undergo surgery in late adolescence after hormones have had chance to work with no similar concerns. The phallocentric culture in which many surgeons operate (in both senses) and the influence of psychoanalytic theory (discussed in chapter 1.6.1) is clear. The need for physicians to make alterations and the demands of parents to know *which* sex their child is, tells us just how important sex and gender are, and how differently the two culturally accepted sexes are treated.

The sociobiological approach (e.g. Wilson, 1975; Goldberg, 1977; Barash, 1982; Kenrick, 1987) as the name suggests, combines social and biological explanations to understand gender, though the focus remains firmly, and almost exclusively, on biology. According to this approach, gender differences are natural and have appeared through evolutionary mechanisms. Observations are made of the 'natural' world and explanations conjectured for them (i.e. a functionalist approach). Goldberg (1977), for example, argues that patriarchy is an inevitable consequence of evolutionary biological difference. For example, it is observed that men often fail to commit in relationships and take less responsibility for childcare. To explain this observation, it has been argued that parents have differential interests in their offspring due to differential investment of energy in reproduction (see also Trivers, 1985). Females, it is argued, invest huge amounts of energy in eggs, the placenta, breasts, lactation and so on whilst the male invests only in the sperm. The female also has only a few large eggs that require a lot of energy to produce, compared to the fifteen million minute disposable sperm cells which could potentially fertilise large numbers of eggs and cost little in terms of energy input.

The two sexes are said to be destined to have conflicting interests because of this differential investment. The male, having invested so little, has little interest in the child or remaining faithful to one partner. The female, having invested so much, desires a stable relationship with one caring partner who will help rear the child. Further,

whereas the female knows the child is hers, the male cannot know for certain (genetic testing is not widely used and is very recent compared to the evolutionary timescale). He is therefore less likely to want to spend energy child-rearing. Females choose their partners carefully because they either want a partner who will be faithful to mother and child and help protect their investment, or a partner who has phenotypically strong characteristics, such as muscular body because he is likely to carry desirable genes.

In sociobiological theories, males and females are treated as homogeneous groups. It is overlooked that there is a whole range of observably different behaviours in males and females, such as men who are single parents and women who give up their investment for adoption. Also, the approach may be criticised from within its own discursive parameters. For example, the female may look for a 'strong' male but an animal's phenotype is not necessarily a good guide to its genotype (e.g. weight trainers may carry genes that will predispose them to illness). Thinking more critically, one also wonders whether the taken-for-granted notion that those who invest most tend to protect their investment most and demand to see a return is a theoretical product of a capitalist society. The sociobiological approach pays far too little attention to culture and none to power. It is also unreflexive about its purportedly unbiased scientific status while often serving the political function of justifying and excusing male domination by claiming men are natural, roaming, individual hunters and women are natural, family-oriented reproducers (Connell, 1995). An approach that pays attention to language, culture and power often tells a very different story. Lees (1993), for example, reminds us that cultural notions of what masculinity and femininity should involve are demonstrated by the positive labelling of promiscuous males as 'studs', whilst similar behaviour in females earns them the negatively valued label 'slag'.

Generally speaking, then, biological approaches have been used un/knowingly to justify men's position of dominance over women (Bleier, 1984). Of course, there is nothing *inherently* wrong with biological study. As Foucault (1972) argues, there is nothing intrinsically good or bad about any discourse - it is the ideological uses to which it is put. Darwinian biology, for example, made questions about sex and sexuality an important agenda where previously it had been seen as god-given and therefore not in need of explanation (Connell, 1987). Biology has also been used to

argue that women are superior (again showing science to be a political story-telling process rather than a objective one). For example, Ashley Montagu (1968), in his book 'The natural superiority of women', argues that scientific evidence shows women are physically, psychologically and socially more advanced than men (see also Hutt, 1972; Maccoby, 1980). Though Montagu acknowledges that we live in a male-dominated culture, this is a myth men preserve, socially overwriting and concealing contrary biological truths. For example, diseases that exclusively or far more frequently affect males (over 60 are mentioned) are attributed to either having a genetically inferior Y chromosome or the *lack* of the genetically superior X chromosome. Life expectancy at birth is higher for females too. At times the work reads more like a 'men as victims' argument (see 2.12). However, it is rhetorically useful as a celebration of women's natural superiority over their fickle counterparts who fight amongst themselves and masquerade as stronger as is implied, for example, through the chivalry and restraint involved in offering a seat to a woman or holding doors open.

A number of feminist theorists have continued to work in the biological sciences or have returned to them afresh with contemporary critical theory in mind. Though the human body has been theorised in many ways in feminism (e.g. Bartky, 1988; Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1991; Bordo, 1993; Shildrick, 1997; Price and Shildrick, 1999) and critical theorising (e.g. Foucault, 1981; Connell, 1987, 1995), and although this thesis is not particularly concerned with embodiment, it is worth looking at an example of how biological discourse can be used to feminist ends. Since feminist theories began criticising the essentialism of biological work, some feminists have begun to return to biological study with a more sophisticated critical realist or 'contingent realist' approach (Benton, 1993; Soper, 1995; Rose, 1998). Much feminist work has managed to theorise the body in ways that do not imply biological determination of gender. However, they have tended to remain at the level of cultural inscription *on* the body or cultural representation *of* the body (e.g. Grosz, 1999). More recent feminist work, however, has criticised feminist theory for being 'skin deep' and remained sensitive to the critiques of essentialism whilst also theorising the internal body (Birke, 1999).

In another work, Birke (2000) looks at how the media sensationalise the findings of biological science, taking them out of context and suggesting gender identity is

determined by biology. For example, some toxic chemicals in the environment have been found to affect reproduction in humans and other animals. The media take this finding and works it up (usually based on a male norm) into talk of 'disappearing' boys, 'emasculated' men, 'transsexual' fish, and how oestrogens are 'female' hormones that are 'to blame' for men's 'sperm crisis' and the 'assault on the male'. Such gender-bending talk assumes gender to be either/or and oppositional with a norm that can be 'bent'. Birke is also concerned that bodily fixity in areas that do not define gender should not be seen as essences. The body is in a state of perpetual flux but balanced through homeostatic mechanisms. It is how these 'realities' come to be used that are potentially damaging as well as scientifically valuable to wo/men. So, for example, it is scientifically observed that during menopause a woman's hormonal levels *shift*. This is not the same as the more value-laden term hormonal *breakdown* and the oppressive ways the knowledge comes to be used. Clearly, a more rounded view that recognises the benefits of science but is ever-watchful of the functions and interests knowledge may serve, both in scientific work and its dissemination, is needed.

In order to tackle the problem of what can be regarded as biological and what can be regarded as sociocultural, Ann Oakley (1972), in her book *'Sex, Gender, and Society'*, makes the useful distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. This distinction has been taken up widely in feminist research (see Segal, 1987), and is an important tool in separating biological sex from the various constructions written onto bodies through language and culture, thus permitting challenge to the taken-for-granted idea that gender automatically maps onto biological sex in any causative, essential, inevitable manner. However, as we have just seen, biological sex cannot be taken for granted either. It too is a cultural linguistic construction and so a simplistic appropriation of this distinction as one between 'nature or nurture' is always problematic. This is a perplexing issue with no easy solutions. It is possible to go on deconstructing until there are no familiar reference points from which to work and make changes. This could lead to an intellectual paralysis or alternatively producing unrecognisable and alienating research by inventing new concepts that would transcend, and therefore probably ignore rather than tackle, such problematic constructs.

This problem is well recognised in feminism and is discussed further in section 2.11. Suffice to say at this juncture, as a strategic political stance, and with disclaimers in mind, this project proceeds on the basis that *by and large* there are individuals with male biology and individuals with female biology, *by and large* they are treated differently, and *by and large* females receive poorer treatment in society than males with few, if any, of the differences being biologically insurmountable or transcendent of human valuation which is culturally and historically specific and changeable. The categories are problematic but that is precisely why critical thinkers have been amassing a body of work that deconstructs them. Using them carefully and reflexively towards change must also be seen as a very different project to the ideological conservatism of much of the biological sciences. Despite the problems, then, the words 'man', 'men', 'woman' and 'women' and other biological/social pointers will be found frequently in the present work. Although individuals could be referred to as 'males' or 'females' (with similar problems), the words 'man', 'men', 'woman' and 'women' help to remind us of the socially constructed character of gender (2.11). They also serve as a reminder that this particular work generally deals with adult masculinity and femininity.

To summarise, then, biological approaches have, with notable exceptions, concentrated unproblematically on two distinct categories that are in fact leaky, blurred, multiple and fragmented. They have abused correlational evidence through causative and deterministic theories, inappropriately conflated 'gender' and 'sex', and posited an essentialist view of the world which presents a static, inevitable view of gender inequality. They are also normatively heterosexist and andro- and phallocentric, and have misrepresented data on mean averages, justified and excused women's oppression, and paid far too little attention, if any, to power and culture.

1.3 Psychometric Approaches

Numerous scales have been devised to measure gender differences. For example, Terman and Miles (1936) constructed a scale capable of differentiating men and masculinity from women and femininity with an average score of +52 for men and -70 for women (with zero as cut off and virtually no men or women falling in the opposite

group). As Wilkinson (1996) points out, more specific trait studies have concluded that women have poorer spatial (Masters and Sanders, 1993) and mathematical (Benbow and Stanley, 1980) abilities and lack assertiveness (Alberti, 1970) compared to men. Trait theory often overlaps with biological theory, for example by looking at hormonal differences. Wilson (1994), for example, 'explains' the under-representation of women as judges, bank managers, company directors, and university professors through the greater competitiveness of men as a result of 'male hormones'.

Some researchers have found differences to be very small or non-existent (Deaux, 1976; Lott, 1978) or reversed compared to cultural expectations (Steinberg and Shapiro, 1982). Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), for example, found no overall difference in 'sociability', conflicting evidence on 'empathy', 'emotionality' and 'dependence', and too little research on tactile sensitivity and competitiveness to reach firm conclusions. However, men were found to be more aggressive and had better mathematical and visio-spatial skills and women had better verbal skills. Where differences are found, little attention has been given to how these are produced culturally. If males and females were found to exhibit different behaviour in different cultures, this would provide very strong evidence that there is no strong psychological or biological foundation to gender.

Mead (1935) found a great deal of cultural difference when she studied three New Guinea tribes who lived separately but within a 100 mile radius. The Arapesh adults valued gentle, loving, and co-operative traits in both males and females, and both sexes were actively involved in child rearing. The Mundugumor valued self-assertive, arrogant, and fierce traits in both males and females. Both sexes despised the whole business of pregnancy and child-rearing. The gender roles of the Tchambuli were the converse of traditional western gender roles. Women gathered food and traded while men, considered sentimental, emotional and inconclusive, spent much of their time gossiping in groups. The psychometric approach has therefore been uncritical of its own ethnocentrism and situatedness within taken-for-granted cultural meanings.

Gender traits are seen as stable, coherent and measurable essences. No account is offered of the demands on people to display stability (see Burr, 1995, in relation to personality). Relatively few individuals are likely to say people generally or they

themselves are 'caring' one minute and 'aggressive' the next. When 'contradictory' behaviours are displayed, the person is brought back into line ('I thought I knew you' or 'you've really surprised me'), justified ('he's only wearing make-up because it's a party'), or excused as 'out of character' implying they will return to their usual gendered self shortly, and so on. Static and coherent categories cannot capture the spirit of the ever-changing and fragmented characteristics of gender (Connell, 1995) and obtaining 'valid' research often involves asking the same questions in multiple guises which takes advantage of the pressure respondents feel to maintain a stable, coherent, and socially acceptable self (Stainton Rogers *et al.*, 1995). This is an especially important consideration given the culture of self-contained individualism which pervades the social sciences and society more generally (Sampson, 1989, 1990). In such a view, either the social or the individual is viewed as determining. Sampson deconstructs this binary, suggesting it obscures the interconnectedness of individuals in society and how individual boundaries are continually breached and interdependent.

As Connell (1995), Stainton Rogers *et al.* (1995) and many others have pointed out, psychometric research also relies on circular definitions. Any item on a scale that discriminates between men and women is seen as valid. But the items are based on stereotypical cultural assumptions. If women respond positively to cooking, for example, and men respond negatively, it should come as no surprise. The scale does not 'discover' anything; there are no 'findings' because everyone is playing the same game. The researcher is using culturally familiar discourses and the researched are responding either as they behave (which says nothing about *why* they do this) or as they feel they would like others to think of them ('discursive positioning' and 'participant orientation' to the social constructionist and 'bias' to the scientist). 'High construct validity' leaves the psychometrician self-satisfied that the scale effectively discriminates between groups. There is little chance of a 'negative' result because not only is there greater interest in 'positive' results and significant differences rather than similarities in scientific research and journals (Greenwald, 1975), but only 'positive' results are likely to be found anyway since it was the scale's *discriminatory* capacities that made it useful, valid and interesting to the scientist in the first place.

As with the biological approaches, one of the failings of the psychometric approach is that it focuses uncomplicatedly on two genders rather than multiple genders (Connell, 1987; 1995). In the 1970s, partly in response to feminist criticism of this oversight, liberal feminist Sandra Bem showed there were actually four genders: masculine, feminine, androgenous, and undifferentiated (this work could have been included in other sections such as liberal feminism (2.2) but is also a psychometric approach and therefore sits comfortably here). Androgenous individuals would display traits stereotypically belonging to both sexes and would be able to flexibly draw on these traits as required according to context and situation. These people would be the most contented, happy and well-adjusted (Bem, 1977). Undifferentiated people did not fall into any of the other categories. Despite sharing similar epistemological and methodological problems with psychometrics generally (Wetherell, 1986), Bem's approach challenges to some extent the focus on biology in both the biological approaches and much of the psychometric approach. It may also be seen as a stepping stone toward recognising the fragmented and multiple character of gender, something stressed increasingly by contemporary critical approaches (Connell, 1987, 1995; Spelman, 1988).

In common with the biological approaches then, this approach is attempting to measure essential differences within self-contained individuals and hence pays no attention to the influence of culture, history, and power. The status quo is accepted for what it is and measured in circular terms. Even remaining within scientific discourse, there is evidence that sex differences are negligible. Sandra Bem has tackled some of the problems to some extent within the psychometric tradition but proper attention to language, power and multiplicity of genders is best provided by feminist social constructionist approaches (2.11) which also see gender as dynamic, changeable, and shifting rather than static, measurable, coherent and singular.

1.4 Cognitive Approaches

The cognitive approaches have been very influential on the social psychological landscape of gender research. This section briefly looks at cognitive developmental

approaches, and work on attitudes and stereotypes. In Kohlberg's cognitive developmental theory (1966), before gender develops, the child first comes to regard him- or herself as a boy or a girl. S/he then begins to pay more attention to or identify with same-sex role models. Unlike the biological or psychometric approaches, the child is therefore afforded agency in the process. Having identified her- or himself as female or male, s/he seeks to model behaviours that are consistent with this view (the reverse of social learning approaches, as discussed in the following section, where others actively reward what they consider appropriate for the child). Kohlberg proposed three stages to gender development. In the first, 'Basic Gender Identity', the 2 to 3 year old is not aware that they will remain the same sex for life and thinks s/he could change sex by doing things associated with the other sex e.g. a boy would think wearing a dress would make him a girl. By age 4 to 6 the child enters the 'Gender Stability' stage in which they are aware that gender identity is stable for life. By 6 to 7 years the child enters the 'Gender Constancy or Consistency' stage and s/he is aware not only that gender identity is stable across time but also across situation, e.g. a boy wearing a dress will be aware that he remains a boy.

Kohlberg's theory has been criticised by Maccoby (1980) who found that 3 year olds prefer sex-typed activities and same-sex playmates and have learned many sex role stereotypes long before the theory would predict. From a more critical social psychological angle, like the approaches discussed above, Kohlberg's theory is also essentialist and deterministic. Gender constancy is seen as a *cause* of imitation and taken as a force that naturally resides within the self-contained individual and which goes through universal stages regardless of social and cultural factors. Social and cultural factors are better tackled in the social learning approaches, which are discussed in the following section (1.5), although Carol Gilligan's work does go a long way toward addressing these issues and is discussed shortly.

Although there is a particular concern with theories of gender here, Kohlberg has also offered an explanation of moral development (e.g. Kohlberg, 1981) that is of interest as an example of how a theory can be gender-biased and therefore serve, often unwittingly, as a theory of gender. According to Kohlberg, each individual, whatever their culture, will develop along a universal trajectory of moral development. They will

go through a maximum of three stages with increasing desirability, in an invariant order, without skipping any, and with no return to previous inferior stages. Some individuals (and cultures) fail to develop their full moral potential. The stages are: one, the 'preconventional' stage, where the individual confuses egocentric personal pleasures and pains with moral right and wrong, i.e. potential punishment is equated with something being 'wrong'. Two, the 'conventional' stage, where the individual is conformist and dutiful to the status quo and able to make moral decisions that take account of others in society generally and cultural rules, norms, laws and authorities. And three, the 'postconventional' stage, where the individual believes laws and norms may usually be of value to individuals and society generally but that they may sometimes be wrong and serve oppressive purposes, for example, maintaining inequality or injustice through inflexibility. For Kohlberg, one's inner conscience and deeper, reflexive, and more flexible and sophisticated thinking should be listened to rather than bullied into submission by rules, conformity, and convention. Only then can individuals take full responsibility for their actions.

This cognitive developmental approach has been severely criticised by Carol Gilligan (1982) who exposed and set about redressing its androcentric bias and universal assumptions. For example, Kohlberg is criticised for privileging abstract, independent, objective, individual (i.e. 'masculine') reasoning. Gilligan asserted that men and women are very different in terms of their moral reasoning. She studied the views of 29 pregnant women on abortion. Women, she argued, are less confident and dogmatic in their moral judgements and use less abstract reasoning techniques. As such they are more interested in individuals than principles. The work has been heavily criticised by Segal (1987), however, who points out that interviewing pregnant women and then comparing women with men who obviously would never be in their position is highly problematic. Further, there would be cultural pressures on the women to appear caring, empathic and interconnected with others, especially when pregnant.

Segal also points out that women have been involved in some great errors of moral judgement such as joyfully surrendering their wedding rings to Mussolini in the 1930s to be melted down and used in armaments. Further, Gilligan analysed her interviewees' moral reasoning without reference to other important identity characteristics such as

'race', class, education, employment, age, politics, and religiousness. The theory is to some extent reactionary, and in offering a quasi-metanarrative of women everywhere, suffers many of the problems it sought to redress (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990). Neither does the approach have a sharp critical edge because the women's reasoning may well have been different if they had access to the power men enjoy. Such theorising, whilst challenging Kohlberg's male bias and universal assumptions, falls prey to similar criticisms. Most importantly, it remains essentialist.

Little attention is given in these approaches to differences across cultures, across history, across individuals, and across time and place for the same individual. This ethnocentric political influence is usually masked in social psychological research by its claims to unbiased scientific status (Stainton Rogers, *et al.* 1995) but is occasionally made more explicit. For example, commenting on social psychological work generally, and whilst paying lip-service to cultural and historical difference, Myers (1993:209) states:

> '[O]ur primary quest in social psychology is not to catalog differences but to identify universal principles of behaviour. Our aim is what cross-cultural psychologist Walter Lonner (1989) calls "a universalistic psychology - a psychology that is as valid and meaningful in Omaha and Osaka as it is in Rome and Botswana."

Other cognitive approaches to gender are attitudes (e.g. Goldberg, 1968; Spence and Helmreich, 1978) and stereotypes (e.g. Williams and Best, 1990). Here there is a move away from the question of *whether* there are sex differences to the more interesting question of how gender difference is said to exist whether it be fact or myth. Attitudes and stereotypes are seen as stable, coherent, and unified internal essences that reside within individual cognitions. Social constructionists such as Edley and Wetherell (1995) have criticised the essentialism and self-contained individualism of these approaches and moved the centre of gravity from the individual to the social, concentrating on language and power, and remaining critical of the status quo rather than working with it. Shifting the focus to language use means the maintenance of gender can be viewed as something that is an ongoing achievement *between* individuals

rather than relatively stable structures *within* individuals as well as accounting for individual contradiction, change, and multiple meanings (2.11, 3.4).

As with the approaches discussed so far, then, the cognitive approaches are relatively insensitive to social factors. They concentrate on stable, coherent and determining cognitive essences located within the self-contained individual and offer universalistic and unsophisticated theories that neglect cultural difference. As such, they leave little space for social change and do little to challenge women's subordination by men. Work on attitudes and stereotypes potentially offers a more culturally sensitive view of gender, but stable and coherent cognitive essences such as these would seem difficult to change. This is not only problematic in terms of political attempts to work for equality between men and women or other social groups, but also, an examination of talk shows that individuals do not offer singular, stable, and coherent views or self presentations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

1.5 Social Learning Approaches

For the purposes of criticism, 'sex role theory' and 'social learning theory' are often considered together (e.g. Connell, 1987) as is the case here. There is also a great deal of overlap between learning theory and trait and cognitive approaches, making the business of categorisation, as always, rather messy and awkward. The work of Sandra Bem has been influential in this area but this has already been covered in relation to psychometics (1.3) so it need not be rehearsed here.

Social learning approaches (e.g. Parsons and Bales, 1956; Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble and Zellman, 1978; Beal, 1994), unlike many of the approaches discussed so far, go some way toward addressing social and cultural influences. The approach also borrows heavily on behaviourism. The child imitates the same sex parent and peers who reinforce 'sex-appropriate' behaviour through reward, whilst discouraging 'inappropriate' behaviours. So, for example, when a boy puts on his sister's dress he may be ridiculed and called a 'sissy' and asked to remove it. Likewise, if a girl likes rough and tumble play she may be regarded as a 'tomboy'. Parents often dress their

children from birth according to totally arbitrary and intrinsically meaningless cultural traditions, for example, 'blue for boys, pink for girls'. To take a further example, boys are likely to be permitted more aggressive behaviour than girls (Sears, Maccoby and Levin, 1957).

It is not clear why the child should observe the same sex parent, peers, etc. Nor is it clear why the child is ascribed no agency and is seen instead as imitating its parents without interpretation. This social determinism fails to account for individual action, resistance and choosing between the various and sometimes contradictory versions of in/appropriate behaviour provided by different parents, guardians, peers, schooling etc. (Stainton Rogers, *et al.*, 1995). On the other hand, as Connell (1987) argues, role theory can also be viewed, regarding parents, as a voluntaristic stance, suggesting that parents choose whether to maintain or resist existing customs with their children in infinite regress. In other words, a child's gender is determined by parents who have agency. This view neglects social structures and power, that is, that not all choices are freely made (Foucault, 1978); cultural codes are not dispensed with lightly. Connell also criticises the normative prescriptions of the field which is often concerned with theorising what an average nuclear family has as its role expectations. Such ideas have an unreflexively normative moralistic tone - what *should* be, rather than what *is*. Different familial arrangements that do not conform to the 'married mother and father with two children a cat and a dog' scenario are thus made to appear deviant (or sometimes dressed up in prettier language e.g. 'non-conformist').

Messner (1997) criticises role theory for looking at stereotypical divides between men and women, such as 'men-as-instrumental/women-as-expressive', which legitimises the current anti-feminist backlash (Faludi, 1992; Whelehan, 2000) (2.12). For example, the Men's Liberation Movement has used the idea that men are socialised as instrumental, i.e. decision makers, rational thinkers, etc., which places a great burden on them, and they are unable to show emotion, which has mental health costs, thus permitting the argument that men get a raw deal and are in fact disempowered just like women. A further criticism put forward by critical social theorists (e.g. Connell, 1987) is that we never speak of 'class roles' or 'race roles'; class and race oppression are more

widely accepted as power issues. Whilst talk of 'race and class *relations*' implies some agency, 'sex roles' appear as socially determined during childhood.

Despite its shortcomings, there is much in common between role theory and social constructionist stances. Role theory does help to explain how parents and other carers and guardians systematically guide children along culturally prearranged lines until the child fits into a slot that largely pre-dated her or his birth (Althusser's notion of 'interpellation' has superficial similarities too, Althusser, 1971). Also, although the approach does not deal with language, discourses may be seen as rewarding or discouraging in terms of the power invested in them in a particular culture at a particular time. That is, disciplinary boundaries create a sense of difference (and of course there are important ones as discussed above), but in many respects 'reward' and 'punishment' are not wholly removed from concepts such as 'power' and 'discipline' in social constructionism and in terms of current cultural valuation of these terms. Further, from a social constructionist feminist viewpoint, the social learning theories make a welcome move away from the ineluctable forces at work in the more essentialist understandings, taking gender theorising into a more socio-cultural arena where change is more likely.

Still, the theory is rather uncritical, reproducing rather than challenging culturally shared values. It is deterministic in terms of its treatment of children as blank slates awaiting parental inscription, yet overly voluntaristic on the part of parents who are regarded as having individual choice over whether to punish or reward behaviour, all of which does little to address culturally and historically situated values and the power invested in them and in their maintenance. In other words, the 'choice' of whether to dress a child in pink or blue is not much of a choice if one can make the 'wrong' choice in the eyes of others and expect to receive ridicule and be on the receiving end of other educational devices for making the 'error'.

1.6 Psychoanalytic Approaches

Psychoanalytic theory has been very influential in gender research. There are numerous traditions with different explanations of gender. Overtly feminist appropriations, including the 'object relations' approach, are discussed in Chapter 2. This section concentrates on traditional Freudian theory and Lacan's reworking of this.

1.6.1 The Freudian Psychoanalytic Approach

In the traditional Freudian approach (1905), gender develops around age 3-6 in the phallic stage which is the third of five developmental stages: oral (age 1), anal (1-3), phallic (3-5 or 6), latency (5 or 6-puberty) and genital (puberty to maturity). Masculinity develops through the 'Oedipus complex'. The boy becomes increasingly passionate about his mother and is jealous that his father possesses her. He would like his father out of his way but he is too big and powerful and the boy comes to fear castration by his father for his unacceptable passions ('castration anxiety'). He therefore identifies with his father and internalises the superior morality of the father. Femininity develops in girls through the 'Electra complex'. The girl thinks she has been castrated and so identifies with the father who possesses what she lacks and desires - a penis ('penis envy'). Realising she will never acquire a penis she gives up and identifies with the mother (Freud could not explain this).

An advantage of the psychoanalytic approach is that it brought sexuality into the equation. Although Freudian theory may be criticised for viewing sexuality as normatively heterosexual, it does suggest the radical idea that when the child enters the world he or she is polymorphously perverse, accounting for parental, and therefore some social and cultural factors, in shaping his or her future (Woodward, 1997). Freud also suggested the subject is fragmented, multiple and unstable; the subject is not the present-to-itself whole of Cartesian myth and humanism generally (Derrida, 1978), being fractured in terms of the conscious/unconscious and 'id'/'ego'/'superego'. The view of the subject as fragmented and multiple is important to the postmodernist,

poststructuralist and social constructionist approaches discussed later (2.9, 2.10 and 2.11).

There are, however, some serious criticisms of Freudian theory, particularly its phallocentric focus on the penis as a central norm whilst marginalising women as having a *lack* of penis (male or not-male) (Culler, 1983). For example, psychoanalysis casts women as having an incomplete sexuality in contrast to male plenitude. Freud's emphasis on the penis as a biological determinant of gender difference neglects the crucial critical concept of power (Firestone, 1970; Millett, 1970). As Tong (1994:145) puts it, 'Had Freud not made the penis the centerpiece of his theory of sexuality, he would have been able to better hear what his patients were identifying as the real causes of their neuroses.' (i.e. men).

Friedan (1974) criticises Freud's ideas as shaped by the culture in which they emerged. In other words, his grand narrative that theorises a universal developmental process has been shaped by what he thought his Enlightened audiences wanted to hear and at the expense of cultural and historical differences. Further, she argues, the theory is biologically and psychologically deterministic, making a search for social change pointless in the face of such involuntary, immutable, and overwhelming forces such as unconscious desires. Still further, she argues the theory is normative, making those who follow a different developmental path 'abnormal'. A further criticism that may be made of the Freudian approach, and psychoanalytic explanations more generally, is that the unconscious may be used as justification and legitimisation for men's oppressive actions or women's tolerance of them, through evacuating individual agency (Woodward, 1997).

1.6.2 The Lacanian Psychoanalytic Approach

Lacan's theory of gendered subjectivity (e.g. Lacan, 1977) moves away from the biological and parental essentialism of much traditional psychoanalytic work and toward language. The centrality of the biological penis in Freud's work is replaced by the 'phallus' - a cultural and metaphorical symbol of power. The phallus is seen as the

primary and privileged signifier, the symbol of power and the Law of the Father - patriarchy itself. In order to enter the realm of language, the symbolic order, the child must become a sexed being. The gender they take on relates directly to the possession, or lack, of the phallus. Unfortunately, then, although Lacanian theory avoids the essentialism of many other psychoanalytic theories, and focuses on the linguistic and symbolic construction of gender, it is phallogocentric (Woodward, 1997), that is, primacy is given to the phallus and to symbolic language which predates the subject. Gendered identity, in this view, is doomed to be forever defined by the possession or *lack* of the phallus; the male is taken as the normative point of reference whilst the female is not-male, much the same as with Freudian psychoanalysis.

As with the debate on Freud, however, the debate on Lacan cannot be brought to closure as to whether the theory provides a politically impotent and fatalistic picture of the inevitability of male domination or a route out. Although many feminists (e.g. Wilson, 1981) have severely criticised the Lacanian reworking of psychoanalysis for providing a theoretical discourse that makes change seem even less likely given the omnipresence of the Law of the Father, Lacan's theory, or to be more precise, its structuralist and phenomenological underpinnings, have been capitalised upon by more recent critical paradigms and post-Lacanian feminist theorists such as Mitchell (1974). Useful ideas include the fragile and fragmented subject, Self and Other, and the decentred subject. Some feminist appropriations of Lacanian theory are discussed in section 2.6.

Lacanian psychoanalysis also draws from other structuralist work, such as that of Levi-Strauss and Saussure, the idea that language never corresponds to reality, but refers only to itself in an infinite regress. This process can be seen when one looks up a word in a dictionary, only to be provided with a definition that requires more words. These words are only meaningful by reference to further words and so on. Another structuralist theme is that language predates the subject, that is, we do not speak language but it speaks us - we cannot truly own and originate it for it was constructed before our birth. In other words, masculinity and femininity are linguistic positions that are waiting for a person before their arrival into the world. These structuralist insights allow us to view gender as precarious and non-biological and therefore open to critique

and change. Poststructuralists have developed these structuralist ideas further (see 2.10).

In its original form, the theory is of limited utility, particularly given Lacan's difficult and elitist writing style which excludes those without, and probably many with, academic training (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Lacanian theory neglects to mention how other identities are formed such as class and 'race' and the possibility that gender is not *special* as a discriminatory force (Wilson, 1981). In other words, how come there is a 'phallic order' but no 'white order' or 'middle class order' (Dalston Study Group quoted in Cameron, 1992)? Lacan has also been criticised for connecting cultural domination and language whilst neglecting power, ideology, and social institutions (see Elliot, 1994). Lacanian psychoanalysis may also be criticised on similar grounds as Freudian theory in that a young, prelinguistic child is credited with seeing male and female genitals differently and with (socially constructed) differential value. As Cameron (1992: 167) writes:

> 'We seem to be in something of an explanatory regress here: children cannot enter the symbolic until they introject the phallus, which they cannot properly do until they know its symbolic value, which cannot happen until they introject the phallus...'

Other criticisms include concerns that the theory does not explain why the phallus, rather than say, the womb, is socially privileged (Ramazanoglu, 1989), and that Lacan leaves us wondering why women are left only with feelings of 'lack' and inferiority (Rubin, 1975) ('jouissance' provides some explanation for this, however, and is covered in section 2.6).

1.7 Conclusions

It is now possible to bring together the major criticisms thus far. An adequate (feminist social constructionist) theory of gender must:

- Avoid essentialist explanations (many of the themes below are subsumed within this broad requirement)
- See gender as an ongoing accomplishment rather than, for example, grounded in biology or childhood
- Recognise that gender is not a 'thing' waiting within the self-contained individual to be 'discovered' and 'measured'
- Avoid universalistic grand narratives and instead capture the complexity of gender as it relates to other social matrices such as 'race' and class
- Replace unities and singularities with diversity and multiplicity
- Incorporate an analysis of power, how it is maintained, and how it works hierarchically within and between theoretically and/or socially recognised groups
- By definition, challenge the status quo. It must provide ways of moving forward toward a projected egalitarian future
- Be reflexive about its own situatedness within particular historical, cultural and local circumstances

The approaches discussed in the following chapter have in common their ability to critically challenge to the status quo. However, as will become clear, this does not necessarily inoculate them against some of the theoretical inadequacies discussed in this chapter.

2 Feminist Theories of Gender

2.1 Introduction

Having considered some of the theories of gender on offer, the more explicitly critical work is now discussed, particularly feminist theory, but also some of the less politically engaged work which nevertheless provides feminism with useful theoretical tools. Some theorists, particularly male theorists, do not identify themselves as 'feminist', but rather, as 'pro-feminist'. This is often due to concern that men cannot 'be feminist' (see 3.5.1). For the purposes of critique, however, 'pro-feminist' work is subsumed here under the 'feminist' label.

Feminism is a highly fragmented political movement and it is generally regarded as more appropriate to refer to 'feminisms' (Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1994). Over the years it has been fragmented by polarising debates such as theory vs. practice, essentialism vs. anti-essentialism, public vs. private as sites for action, mainstream vs. separatism, pro- vs. anti-pornography, equality vs. difference, and so on. The kinds of general questions asked are also diverse and multiple. For example: What is gender? How many genders and sexes are there? How does gender relate to biological sex? How are gender relations constituted and maintained? How does gender intersect with other identity axes such as class, 'race', and sexuality? How is male dominance maintained? Do men and women think differently? If so, is this innate, learned, or discursive? Should theory be reasonable and rational or escape these male confines? Should it be empirically supported? Will women's and men's empirical view of the world be overwhelmingly coloured by their relative positions of power? If so, can men be involved in feminism? Should feminism be objectivist, interpretationist, experiential? Should it rationally assert truths or recognise this as a male game and focus efforts on undermining this notion? The list of questions is therefore a very long one and unsurprisingly there is an equally diverse set of responses (Chodorow, 1980; Stacey, 1983; Flax, 1990).

As Flax (1990) points out, this complexity may at times be bewildering but it is at least a sign that the taken for granted concept of 'gender' is being rigorously questioned thanks to feminist debate. Only some of the debates can be covered here, hopefully enough to give a flavour of the differences between feminisms and to contextualise the present work. Liberal, radical, Marxist ('marxist' from now on so as not to privilege it amongst its lower case counterparts), socialist, psychoanalytic, existentialist, multiracial, postmodernist and poststructuralist feminisms are discussed. Taxonomies such as this are, as always, a modernist endeavour, sorting complex matters into simplistic categories between this and that which conceal leakiness, overlap, etc. (1.1, 1.2). Further, such taxonomies are always incomplete, and all theses will be defined by what they absent as well as what they present. Numerous feminisms have been excluded such as 'ecofeminism' (Plumwood, 1993; Sturgeon, 1997) either because they have less obvious relevance or because they add little by way of critique to support the chosen social constructionist approach. 'Cyberfeminism' is discussed later as it relates more specifically to the study presented in Chapter 6. Hopefully, the disservice the taxonomy and critique does to similarity and overlap between feminisms and through exclusion is a useful trade-off with respect to greater clarity, focus and relevancy to the particular project at hand.

Of course, this critique will read like an argument for a particular strand of feminism but this should be seen as a rhetorical attempt, perhaps even at times a caricaturisation of other feminisms, in order to position the present work, rather than a prescription for 'good research' or a suggested 'party line'. All feminisms play a useful political role and heterogeneity should be regarded as a sign of a healthy debate rather than a depressive impasse or a sign of weakness (Ramazanoglu, 1989). As Spender (1980) argues, plurality of vision is a necessary part of feminism. Coherency is a man-made construct built around singular notions of 'truth' and 'rationality'. In practice, it is probably fair to suggest most feminists oscillate between feminisms according to the context and moment, preferring challenge to the status quo over theoretical purity. However, in the academic context in which this work appears, despite the postmodern, poststructuralist and social constructionist turn toward fragmentation and contradiction, it remains an expectation that such inconsistencies are expelled wherever possible.

2.2 Liberal Feminism

The focus in this strand of feminism is on securing equal educational and civil rights for women as currently enjoyed by men. The false belief circulating in society that women are naturally intellectually and physically inferior leads to all manner of customary and legal constraints on them in the public world, for example, in the academy and the labour marketplace (e.g. Wollstonecraft, republished 1975; Mill, 1970). Liberal feminism demands that men and women are given a level playing field; that neither group is disadvantaged. Wollstonecraft argues that women should seek rationality and other 'masculine' attributes in order to be equal with men. Rationality sets humanity apart from animality and therefore women must seek not to be emotional and impulsive, but rather, more controlled, rational and moral. If women are less rational, it is because they have been systematically excluded from areas that would provide the necessary socialisation. Girls and women must therefore be given equal access to education. This may be criticised for accepting stereotypical notions of 'female traits' (1.3) and leaving 'male traits' unquestioned as normatively desirable, which also leaves females with the responsibility for change (Martin, 1985).

Liberal feminists such as John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill (1970) argue that as well as equal educational rights, women must be given the same civil liberties and economic opportunities as men. Women, it was argued, married or not, should work outside the domestic sphere. The approach has been criticised, however, for its classism because it was written with wealthy middle class women in mind who had servants to take care of domestic work and child-rearing (Tong, 1994). Still, the advantage of the approach is its insistence on equality of opportunity for women and men and for this to take precedence over biology. Many men are stronger than many women, for example, but this should not exclude women from physically demanding areas without fair opportunity, or preclude efforts to make the work possible for all women (e.g. more effective machinery which reduces the importance of any muscular differences).

Another criticism of the liberal feminist approach is that it works within the current status quo, using concepts and language that are taken on face-value and rarely questioned. So for example, structures such as the family and marriage are worked with and changes encouraged within familiar terms to make women's lives better without

challenging the institutions themselves (Ramazanoglu, 1989). This is particularly problematic if one takes the view that men, or institutions run by them, have a larger say in meaning-making. This is something much better addressed by radical feminism (2.3) and the more language-oriented approaches (2.11). Further, poststructuralist (2.10), postmodernist (2.9) and other more discursively oriented approaches are also more able to tackle the 'equality vs. difference' or 'sameness vs. difference' debates which, as Fine and Addelston (1996) and Scott (1992) argue, are inherited dichotomies that have sometimes bound feminism to inappropriate either/or questions which conceal the fact that both poles may actually fail to challenge, or even promote, continued oppression of women. For example, as Fine and Addelston (1996: 68) put it:

> 'The robes of sameness and equality testify, 'We can do it. Just like the men.' Subtext: you don't have to change anything for us to fit in.'

2.3 Radical Feminism

Unlike liberal feminism, radical feminism offers a wide-ranging challenge to social institutions. Small scale changes within the system are see as relatively unhelpful. If social institutions such as the family, sexuality, academy, religion and marriage are corrupt, it is these social institutions that must be abolished or radically reformulated. Some of these areas are examined below. Radical feminists do not believe liberal (2.2) or marxist (2.4) strands go far enough. For example, inequality cannot be addressed by simply restructuring rights or the economy. It is a system of 'patriarchy' that oppresses women and to bring about equality this systematic male domination must be collapsed.

Radical feminists have, for example, looked at how women are constrained by their biology, particularly reproduction, and how new reproductive technologies could improve women's lives (Firestone, 1970; O'Brien, 1981). Women need to take charge of their reproductive destiny by controlling, for example, their use of contraception, sterilisation, abortion, in vitro fertilisation, (Corea, 1985) and child-rearing (Rich, 1976; Ruddick, 1984). Other radical feminists have made proposals for emancipating women through encouraging a culture of androgyny to minimise the differences between the sexes. Millett (1970), for example, argues that patriarchal ideology exaggerates

biological differences between the sexes, pushing men into dominant roles and women into subordinate roles. Patriarchy is reinforced through large scale institutions such as the family, church and academy as well as literature. For example, the writing of male authors such as D.H. Lawrence who wrote stories about men's abuse and humiliation of women tended to be read as *prescriptions* for acceptable behaviour.

Millett also attacked the biological essentialism of Freud and Talcott Parsons who wrote in a manner that would suggest the power differential between the sexes was somehow natural, or necessary to the functioning of society, respectively. Millet argues that we should make it possible for people of both sexes to display stereotypical behaviours of the 'opposite' sex. The cultural rather than natural basis of such 'traits' would then become apparent and with no necessity for 'masculine men' and 'feminine women' gender would become fragmented and we could look forward to the disintegration of large-scale inequality. Unfortunately, this androgenous ideal would leave 'feminine' qualities unchallenged and they, and feminine individuals, would remain negatively valued as with liberal approaches (Raymond, 1979).

Daly (1973), influenced by an existentialist ontology (2.7), has also argued that religion is at the heart of patriarchal oppression, particularly Judaism, Islam and Christianity. God is seen as transcendent, occupying a place we do not and looking down on His subjects. The natural world was called into being out of nothingness and shall forever remain subject and subordinate. As woman is associated with nature whilst man is cast in His image and likeness, woman is destined to remain subordinate and Other, whilst man is destined to be dominant, powerful, Self, and transcendent. In a later work, Daly (1978) argues that men are out to oppress women's bodies as well as their minds through practices such as foot binding, suttee (former Hindu custom whereby a widow burns herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre), purdah (some Muslim and Hindu women are expected to keep themselves out of sight of males or keep their body covered), clitoridectomy, witch-burning, etc. Daly has revalued feminine traits and pointed out that virtues such as love, compassion and sharing are not necessarily 'good', especially when related to excessive self-sacrifice. Women will only become equal with men when they break free from expectations and refuse to be slaves and victims.

As a reaction to women's brutal and inhumane treatment at the hands of men, many radical feminists have often argued that the future should be a 'feminine' one. Some radical feminists have called for a transformation of, or resistance to, heterosexuality and for women to explore celibacy, autoeroticism or lesbianism (Vance, 1984; Bunch, 1986). These feminisms often focus on the 'compulsory institution of heterosexuality' as the main cause of women's oppression. Sexuality is often regarded as a 'choice' but it can hardly be a freely chosen when the costs of adopting any sexuality other than heterosexuality are so high (Rich, 1980, Valeska, 1981; Dworkin, 1987). Much of the contemporary work in this field combines the politics and insights of earlier radical feminist work with the methodological utility of discourse analysis and the increased theoretical sophistication of social constructionism (2.11) (e.g. Kitzinger, 1987; Gavey, 1992; 1996; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1993; Kitzinger, 1996).

The essentialism and phallocentrism of some earlier work often provokes strong reactions: 'The promotion of a progressive sexual politics between women and men, let alone the struggle for any more general egalitarian relations between them, enters the dustbin of feminist history, replaced by the cheerless certainty of men's rapacity' (Segal, 1987: 214). Furthermore, hooks (2000) argues that much of this anti-male stance stems from the fact that most radical feminists are white and middle class. As such they are more interested in obtaining equal right to the privileges that their white male counterparts enjoy. Black women and working class women have often had to combat other forms of oppression (racist, classist) and are used to working with rather than against men despite the problems. Segal (1987) has also criticised the taken-for-granted idea that women have a deep essential character that is closer to nature. Nature and 'mother' earth are often imbued with gentleness and sensuality when they could be seen as brutal and bloody. In other areas men are seen as closer to nature through being forceful, violent, animal-like, etc., whilst women are more cultural, domestic and civilised, demonstrating the rhetorical character of appeals to 'naturalness'. If women are often observed as more caring this is because they are expected to do work that requires these sorts of attributes such as childcare rather than because of some essential women's nature.

The concept of 'patriarchy' in its radical feminist formulation is problematic too. If all men have universal power over all women, and the only things that define the two

groups in anything like a constant manner is biological sex, the social world has in some ways been reduced to essential biological determinants (Ramazanoglu, 1989). However, some theorists have modified the radical feminist position somewhat and argued that whilst all men may benefit from the patriarchal dividend, women's oppression lies in language use and institutionalised power rather than biologically grounded male power, thus making patriarchy more open to change (Spender, 1985; Connell, 1995). Unfortunately, Spender's work remains essentialist and universalistic (Spender's work is discussed later in section 3.2). Connell's work takes an anti-essentialist stance and is discussed in section (2.11).

Radical feminism, then, apart from contemporary cross-overs with discourse theory, is generally essentialist and universalist in its focus on rather simplistic notions of patriarchy. As Messner (1998) argues, whilst such an oversimplification can have benefits in terms of theoretical clarity and a strong, well-defined focus and target for action, it glosses over the interplay of class, 'race', and sexualised systems of oppression (see also Connell, 1995; Messner, 1997). The idea that men are essentially corrupt does not bode well if it is men who need to change either (Holliday, 1978; Pease, 2000). Much of the earlier radical feminist work fails to take account of the role of language in the maintenance of male power and where it does it has remained essentialist and universalistic.

2.4 Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism builds on classic marxist theory (e.g. Engels, 1972). It offers a more sophisticated view of women as a fragmented group than does early radical feminist work, taking into account social class as an axis as well as gender. Class inequality is seen as the root of gender inequality and theorising on class inequality can be transposed onto gender inequality. Unlike liberal feminism, but in common with radical feminism, marxist feminism includes a strong analysis of power. A relative minority of people, the middle classes, have the power whilst the majority of working class people have not, but overlapping with this, and borrowed from radical feminism, is the notion of patriarchal oppression. Capitalism comes under scrutiny in this view for it is the possession of private property and the means of production which are largely male

privileges that allow men to dominate and control women. Only a move to a socialist system, where the means of production belongs to everyone, male and female, can bring about equality. Marxist feminism has been particularly important in highlighting how women's *production of children* in the familial domestic setting has been devalued and unpaid compared to men's *production of things* in the economic material context, and how domestic work has been regarded as a service rather than paid work (Gardiner, 1976; Kaluzynska, 1980; Mies, 1986).

According to Hartmann (1983), patriarchy predates capitalism. The key site of women's oppression is the family. Men have appropriated women's and children's domestic labour and as capitalism threatened to erode the institution of the family by equally valuing the labour of women and children men sought to retain control through wage differentials, segregation at work, and the concept of the family wage. Men's earlier direct control became increasingly institutionalised, diffuse, and hidden, making challenging it more difficult and shaping women's lives to the point where they are unable to be consciously aware of their oppression and believe the familial institution to be a normal, natural and ideal state of affairs.

Barrett (1980) takes a similar line, arguing that the sexual division of labour predates capitalism and that the family is the primary site for the reproduction of male power over and above economic disparity. In the family, women are expected to be pleasers of men and to tend to the children and this is ideologically presented as a natural state of affairs. Although Barrett is careful not to suggest sexual relations and emotional fulfilment are necessarily all 'bad', the uses to which they are often put and the frequent claim that things could not be different (without the world collapsing at any rate) are ideological. The meaning of masculinity, femininity and the family has changed continually throughout history and is therefore open to change in the present.

MacKinnon (1989) focuses specifically on sexuality as the site for women's oppression. Her work sits neatly between radical and socialist feminism and draws heavily on marxism. Her opening sentence (1989: 3) reads:

> 'Sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism: that which is most one's own, yet most taken away.'

The elite classes own the means of production and labourers work for them before having the fruits of their labour taken away and sold for profit and to the benefit of those in power. Similarly, women feel relatively contented that heterosexual relations are natural, normal and beneficial to them and are therefore unaware of their oppression by men. Neither a focus on the family or economics can fully account for this. Nor can it account for more overt abuses of power such as men's aggression, sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence. The marxist feminist approach may be criticised for arguing for a 'true' class and gender consciousness beyond 'false' consciousness. This is discussed in section 3.3. Marxist and socialist feminisms overlap in many respects. Their common shortfalls are discussed together in the following section.

2.5 Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism builds on marxist feminism but rather than seeing gender as secondary to class struggle, it is given primary or equivalent attention. Marxist theory can explain how the public workplace and the private domestic sphere came to be separated but, as socialist feminists see it, it cannot explain how it is that men came to be associated with public work and women with private domestic duties rather than the other way around. Marx had failed to account for the work of women for the capitalist state: pregnancy, labour, childcare, domestic work. In other words, the focus had been on the public at the expense of the private. It was therefore seen as necessary to study the patriarchal power of men as well as the power of the elite classes under capitalism.

Whereas marxist feminism has been overly focussed on class, socialist feminism has provided us with more nuanced accounts of how class and gender interact. For example, Tolson (1977) describes how working class male shop-floor workers may over-compensate for institutional disempowerment by their middle class bosses by feminising them as 'paper-pushers' or homosexuals who avoid hard physical graft, by promoting forms of macho posturing, bravado or comradeship, or by sabotaging the production process through collective action e.g. strikes, and thus emphasising a degree of control. Unfortunately, whilst socialist feminism has brought together the concepts of class and gender, other social divisions such as 'race', ethnicity, and sexuality have

tended to be subsumed under these two superstructures rather than being treated as axes of power in their own right, if considered at all (Messner, 1997) (although see Hennessy and Ingraham, 1997, for a collection of works on race, ethnicity, class and gender).

In addition to this problem, there is a failure to examine how language use maintains inequality. Socialist feminists tend to cluster in fields such as anthropology, political science, and history rather than in fields such as communication and psychology (Cirksena and Cuklanz, 1992). Rowbotham (1981), Brittan and Maynard (1984) and Connell (1987) argue that capitalism and patriarchy are essentialist theories, whether they are theorised as semiautonomous 'dual systems' or as 'unified systems' which treat them as inseparable (e.g. Hartmann, 1979; Eisenstein, 1979; Young, 1997). Capitalism and patriarchy are seen as top-down overarching systems which leave little room for individual agency, and therefore responsibility, and possibilities for change (Brittan, 1989). Neither does the marxist feminist concentration on class and capitalism account for the fact that the subordination of women occurred in pre-capitalist societies, in all classes under capitalism, and in societies that have ceased to be capitalist (Connell, 1987).

The marriage between marxism and feminism in particular has been an unhappy one (Hartman, 1979). Whilst contradiction is not grounds for dismissal, it is worth mentioning that some marxist and socialist feminists find themselves in very complex political and theoretical positions because they seek to prioritise the working classes at the expense of the middle classes whilst both classes are represented by women, and academics are often regarded as middle class. Further knotty problems stem from the fact that sensitivity to class means treating men of lower status different to those of higher status even though most men benefit from the patriarchal dividend regardless of personal politics and social status (Connell, 1995).

Flax (1990), with a postmodernist concern for difference at the fore (2.9), criticises socialist feminists, especially those drawing heavily on marxist theory, for sometimes assuming that concepts deeply rooted in capitalism also apply to other non-capitalist cultures. Though extending the marxist concept of 'labour' to women's unpaid domestic work was useful, it has sometimes been widened to accommodate almost all forms of human activity (e.g. Young, 1980), thus undermining the concept's discriminatory

effectiveness. Although socialist feminism has played a crucial role in pointing out the inadequacies of marxist theory, it often searches for essential, universal and fundamental explanations, which does a disservice to the heterogeneous character of the groups we call (as a first approximation) 'men', 'women', 'working class', 'middle class'.

Some marxist and socialist theorists, however, have made more sophisticated attempts to bring women together without homogenising them and whilst striking a balance between focussing on class and sex oppression and liberation. Ramazanoglu (1989) and Bhavnani and Coulson (2001), for example, argue for a focus on liberation which takes difference into account whilst retaining some notion of unity, rather than focussing simplistically on universalised oppression. Lynne Segal (1987, 1990) similarly walks a line between unity and diversity, as does Haraway (1985), who combines socialism and a critique of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism with a postmodernist (2.9) emphasis on fractured identities, multiplicity, and contradiction in and amongst groups such as 'women' who are regarded as similar in terms of *affinity* rather than *identity*. Connell (1987, 1995) takes a different theoretical route but with a similar balance in mind, managing to retain a focus on class and gender and other stratifying structures such as 'race' whilst accounting for complexity by employing the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', a concept he borrowed from Gramscian class analysis. Connell's and Segal's work is discussed in more detail later as it lends itself well to the social constructionist position (2.11).

2.6 Psychoanalytic Feminism

Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories have been covered in the previous chapter (1.6). Here, feminist appropriations of psychoanalytic theory are critically examined, in particular, a very brief overview and critique of the work of Karen Horney, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, Luce Irigaray, Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous.

Karen Horney (1926) rejected Freud's phallocentrism and replaced the centrality of the penis with the idea that males envy their mother's reproductive capacity ('womb envy'). For Segal (1997), although the approach has served useful purposes in offering

an opposition and alternative to Freud's phallocentric theory, it is reactionary and remains biologically essentialist. Also, through ideas such as men's creativity in science and art being a compensation for their lack of procreative power, she showed that psychoanalysis is an interpretative art rather than a scientific theory of human nature. Horney offers yet another universal theory which fails to recognise cultural, social, and historical differences and normalises heterosexuality. Criticism has also been made by Wright (1992), who argues that Horney's work justifies incest (particularly problematic is the idea that the young girl desires violent intercourse with her father) as well as legitimising male independence and violence (resistance is seen as leading to neuroses).

The object relations theorists Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow also concentrate on mothering as the single most important factor in shaping the gendered individual. Dinnerstein (1977), concentrating on the pre-oedipal child, claimed that the child experiences extreme ambivalence towards the mother for she is the source of pleasure, comfort and food but she is also an omnipotent power and the child fears engulfment. The boy disidentifies with her, flees from femininity, and counter-identifies with the father. From then on he sees all females as universally having the same traits as his mother and experiences ambivalence toward them, worshipping yet abusing them and claiming independence from them. The girl's ambivalence stems from fears of merging once again with the mother and losing her identity whilst recognising she has to become what she hates because she too will probably bear children. This leads to conflict with other women and self-harm. The solution in this view is shared parenting. The father who normally offers an escape route into law, culture and power would be both loved and despised just as the mother and other women are.

Like Dinnerstein, Chodorow (1978) concentrated on the pre-oedipal relationship. The mother treats girls and boys very differently. The girl suffers anxiety because she finds it difficult to establish her own identity. She desires to be independent like her father (this is what Freud had taken to be 'penis envy') but cannot break free from the mother-child relationship leading to high personal costs such as little sense of self and agency, and a constant defining of herself in relation to others. In this way, she becomes locked into the patriarchal system of caring for, nurturing, and providing for children and men. The pre-oedipal boy, on the other hand, is encouraged by the mother

to have a sense of self in preparation for culture in later life where he will seek success, aggressively fight for what he wants, and assert independence. The son's flight from femininity will be ongoing as he constantly seeks to assert that which he is not. Chodorow's solution was also to restructure parenting so that fathers were involved.

The work of Dinnerstein and Chodorow is appealing to those who think the popular sex-role socialisation theories (1.5) do not explain how deeply entrenched male domination is, and that they offer a rather superficial manifesto for change, e.g. that boys should be given dolls to play with. It also explains the stubbornness of 'traits' seen in many men and women. As well as accounting for the deep entrenchment of patriarchy, it also avoids the phallocentrism and biologism of Freud, offering a (stubborn) cultural understanding which is more optimistic about change. The mother is also given a more prominent role.

However, the theories remain essentialist and totalising in that one single aspect of social life, mothering, is taken to be root cause of women's oppression. This essentialism is problematic for three main reasons (following Fraser and Nicholson, 1990): One, the theory assumes a deep-seated self that is constituted in early childhood and remains throughout life regardless of new experiences. Two, this self is seen as similar across 'race', class, ethnicity, etc. yet it is different between men and women (see also Spelman, 1988; Rutherford, 1992). Thirdly, this deep self is responsible for all actions of the person, thus ignoring external and discursive influences. Segal (1997) points out that while the search is on for deep and mysterious intrapsychic phenomena, there is a danger of ignoring the rather obvious fact that it is often culturally acceptable and sometimes desirable for men to be independent and aggressive. Further, care-giving is assigned universal feminine status regardless of the sex of the carer, making a change in childcare arrangements insufficient (Norton, 1997). The theory may also be seen as blaming the victims of oppression by resting the buck with the mother, which also lets men off the hook (Brittan, 1989). Arguing for the involvement of both parents in parenting seems progressive prima facie but has the implicit problem of being based on normative notions of the 'ideal family' which fails to acknowledge single parents, gay parents, adoptive and step-parents and so on (Connell, 1995)

Some feminists such as Mitchell (1974) have enthusiastically taken up and developed Lacanian psychoanalysis, arguing that it can be used to *explain* women's oppression rather than to *justify* it. Mitchell combined the insights of Lacan's theorising of patriarchy with a critique of capitalism, arguing that the two systems go hand in hand. Capitalism brings with it differentiation in employment, parenting, valuing of the female, etc. The theory has been criticised though for its vagueness and naivety regarding political and social change (Flieger, 1991). Mitchell has also been accused of being a 'dutiful daughter' (Grosz, 1990), remaining loyal to Lacan's symbolic realm whilst taking little interest in social structural conditions. Mitchell's expectation of a wholesale cultural revolution toward marxist communism is looking very unlikely in our shifting and fragmenting postmodern western world too. The Lacanian contradiction of rejecting essentialism, yet describing the symbolic as predating the subject, is also left undeveloped (Grosz, 1990).

Other feminists have also argued that Lacan did in fact provide potentially politically valuable concepts. For example, feminine *jouissance* or desire remains outside the phallic language because it belongs to the pre-oedipal stage and is therefore outside the phallic symbolic order. Hélène Cixous, for example, has tried to utilise this space through *écriture féminine*, a form of writing that uses disruption, grammatical and syntactic subversion, and other forms of word play to express this feminine Other (Jones, 1986). Though she uses this feminine space, she takes the positive step of avoiding the essentialism of seeing only women as having access to feminine writing or men to masculine writing: 'To be signed with a woman's name doesn't necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be masculine writing, and conversely, the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity.' (Cixous, 1981). Irigaray has also sought to recapture female sexuality which she argues has been lost in patriarchal definitions (Whitford, 1991). In this view women need to rediscover their essential femininity which lies in their body's capacity for multiple and heterogeneous pleasure as compared to men's singular focus on the penis. As well as having plural pleasures and desires that are Other to men, women's language is also plural, incoherent, incomprehensible and Other to male language which centres on rationality organised around the phallus.

Unfortunately, Irigaray loses the advantageous Freudian insight that the child is initially bi-sexual (polymorphously perverse), in favour of an essentialist formulation of a masculinity and femininity that always existed (Weedon, 1987, 1993). Asserting fundamental differences between the sexes in such a universal way has the detrimental effect of prescribing masculinity for men and femininity for women. The political usefulness of this approach seems doubtful because escaping the phallic language which is in general currency can make the writing alienating and elitist for women as well as men (Tong, 1994). Also, could, for example, poorly educated working class or third world women express themselves in this way, or is jouissance only for the privileged (Moi, 1985)? As Cixous and Kristeva (below) argue, men also have access to this writing style. However, Irigaray questions whether men speaking through the feminine is an attempt to colonise women's otherness and bring it within the economy of the Same. This could be perceived as an essentialist stance (although she may have been misunderstood - Whitford, 1991). Also, Woodward (1997) asks, how can anyone express through language that which escapes language? Further, women generally use phallic language which is deemed unacceptable and dependent on men, yet if they speak outside of this they speak irrationally and emotionally, leaving them in double bind which centres around common female stereotypes.

This kind of work, particularly that of Irigaray, has been accused of celebrating an essential femininity and difference between men and women, reducing women to little more than an effect of sexual identity (i.e. back to biology), and ignoring difference within the category of woman (Segal, 1997). It has also been accused of celebrating the feminine within the existing status quo rather than challenging the patriarchal order (Weedon, 1993). Some writers have defended *l'écriture féminine* against charges of essentialism. These writers, such as Dallery (1994), do not seem to address the problem that men may also have jouissance, an always already left-over of phallocentric discourse. Perhaps this is repressed? Maybe men could and should be involved in poetic language (Cixous would reject this because she moves into the essentialist stance that women's language and feminine libido is linked with their sexual organs). Unfortunately, and in an ironically defensive manoeuvre, Dallery does not address these issues which could provide men with ways of challenging patriarchy, moving instead to apply psychoanalysis to anti-essentialists, suggesting that they are repressing the idea of Otherness.

Julia Kristeva (1974), like Cixous (above) addresses the problem of mapping language onto gender, and valorising the feminine, arguing that women may speak in a *masculine* style and men may speak in the *feminine* style (the two styles actually being fictitious constructions of metaphysical philosophy). Unfortunately, Kristeva, like all psychoanalytic theorists, seeks deeper meaning, for example, that the infant has an irrational sense of disgust with its own body and its mother's, for example, with blood, mucous and excrement. As with most psychoanalytical explanations this is rather fanciful. How can disgust at bodily materials be hard-wired and beyond social constructedness? Infants do not seem to mind playing with their faeces, for example, until told not to by their parents and other educators with a particular set of culturally rehearsed facial expressions, tone of voice, etc.

A more language-oriented feminism can deal adequately with gender within a critical framework without appealing to mysterious, grounding forces and energies such as these (2.11). We do not need psychoanalytic concepts, for example, to tell us that women are marginal, excluded, abused, bruised, despised, abandoned, subordinated, rejected, expected to make the food and drink, left holding the baby and given the shit-work in both the private and public sphere. The tendency is often to conflate the cultural 'stubbornness' of gender inequality with individual 'entrenchment' and then to assume we have to look further than language (and practice which is also discursively sanctioned, valued, etc.) for causative explanations (Norton, 1997) where more parsimonious explanations will do. Not only does psychoanalytic theory look too deep (which, as an important aside, also makes understanding and change less likely for those without access to academic knowledge), but it offers a totalising, trans-cultural and trans-historical grand narrative which ignores differences. A social constructionist approach is needed to account for the changing, flexible, fluid and ongoing performance of gender and to leave space for agency and difference. A discursive approach can also address the gendering experiences of school, work, subcultures, pubs, etc. as well as the family.

2.7 Existentialist Feminism

This approach is perhaps best represented by the classic text *The Second Sex* written by Simone de Beauvoir (trans. and published, 1988). Women, in this view, are oppressed because they are man's 'Other'. Women are not seen in society as a category in their own right, but rather, in relation to men. They are *not*-man. Man is the Self, a free agent who defines his own being whilst woman is his Other and has her meaning defined for her. In order to be emancipated, a woman must escape the impositions of meaning imposed by men, find her own, and truly be herself. The Other is a threat to the Self for if the two were not distinguishable there would be no way of asserting a positive identity. Women are therefore a threat to men. In order to protect his Self and his freedom, the man must subordinate women and keep them at a distance.

Femininity in this view does not develop through penis envy as in classical psychoanalysis (1.6.1). Rather than being the desire in women to have a penis *per se*, it is the cultural and symbolic power having a penis brings (e.g. power, domination, rationality, morality), as with Lacanian psychoanalysis (1.6.2), that is important. Women therefore do not 'lack' penises, but rather, they lack the power accorded those who find themselves in a male embodiment. De Beauvoir also looked at how myths played a part a women's oppression. Men, she argues, have constructed myths about women that cast them as Other, subservient, and self-sacrificial. Examining literature, for example, work by D.H. Lawrence, de Beauvoir showed that women are expected to forget, deny and in other ways negate themselves in order, for example, to be men's handmaids, and to save them from damnation, ruin, prison, or death. These myths also serve to veil women's nature. The woman's body reminds man of his own life, death, animality, etc. In a flight from carnality and mortality, he expects her to cover herself e.g. with make-up and mask that to which she otherwise points. She is expected to veil her true natural, animal status, for example, with perfume to disguise her natural odour. Man controls her and she cannot easily escape. The myths become internalised and the woman comes to know herself and her body in and through his terms.

There is much that is appealing about this approach. Power is important to the analysis, showing men (and women) to be perpetuating myths that keep women in their 'place'. Language is also included in the analysis of myth. Parallels can be drawn

between this aspect and discourse analysis (3.4) which also seeks to see the world not as a real 'given', but as held in place by language and power. Women are also seen as becoming women through social processes: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir, 1988: 249). There are, however, some troubling oversights. Whilst the idea that women are expected to cover and adorn their bodies to mask nature makes sense, it is also applicable to men who wear aftershaves and other perfumes, come home wreaking of Other smells such as coal, oil, manure, etc., and sometimes wear makeup e.g. the 'New Romantics' of the 1980s (e.g. Duran Duran and Boy George). Existentialist feminism, as espoused by Simone de Beauvoir, has been severely criticised for its lack of reflexivity, in particular, for addressing gender, class and 'race' whilst neglecting the work's own white, middle- and upper-class bias (Spelman, 1988). The analysis is taken to be representative of, and normative for, women generally but clearly revolves around these relatively privileged groups of women and fails to acknowledge that working class women are generally Other to middle class women.

The anti-essentialism of de Beauvoir's ontological move away from biology, psychology and economics to *being* is both useful and problematic. It is useful in the sense that change seems within our grasp if we are not the puppets of mechanisms beyond our control. Yet, the turn to *being* leads us into an interesting but fanciful land that, politically speaking, is difficult for many academics, let alone non-academics to understand, thus undermining its political efficacy. The language of de Beauvoir and existentialism, for example, 'being-for-itself', and 'immanence', has been criticised by Elshtain (1981), who also criticises de Beauvoir's negative evaluation of the body as dirty, shameful, marching towards death, etc. The body could easily be constructed in a positive light, as could motherhood and menstruation, etc., whilst maintaining the cultural and historical situatedness of values to the contrary. Further, the approach prizes mind over body and will not be so appealing to those women who prefer to live through bodily experience. Still further, and in relation to this point, Elshtain (1981) and Simons and Benjamin (1979) criticise the androcentrism of a theory that prizes the male body and male norms (mind, reason, freedom, self and so on) over female animality, emotion, etc.

Lloyd (1984) also criticises the androcentrism of the theory. 'Transcendence', argues Lloyd, is a male ideal by definition and at odds with the feminist project. A person is both Self (transcending, looking, and acting) or Other (looked at, passive and imminent). There is no middle ground to occupy. The conscious being can, for example, see its fingers and know they are part of Self but yet the Self is doing the looking and casting them as somehow Other. Man transcends woman similarly by being the active looker whilst the woman is a passive object upon which he looks and acts. He therefore, in relation to women, occupies Self status, transcending that which he is not. Women, however, cannot transcend their femininity in this way. Although the space and status they occupy has been created for them by men it is nevertheless the space they know themselves by. Female transcendence therefore requires the women to occupy masculine space; in other words, to flee the feminine and to view this as Other. In this view women are being asked to self-destruct, for they cannot retain their femininity whilst simultaneously seeing it as alien.

The notion of Othering is frequently used in social constructionist projects and discourse theory (e.g. Riggins, 1997), though it tends to be used more subtly to refer to men's *aggregate* power as a group over women as a group and their distancing from them, whilst recognising there are differences in terms of access to power within these groups according to other intersecting social axes such as 'race', age, and sexuality.

2.8 Multiracial Feminism

For multicultural feminists there are two central problems that need to be addressed: one, the oppressive treatment of minority groups and ignorance of their needs in society generally, and two, the ethnocentrism of majority feminist politics (hooks, 1982, 2000). In short, women of colour and other ethnic groups are 'doubly disadvantaged' by being both 'not-white' (etc.) and 'not-men' and these multiple identities need to be viewed together (Malveaux, 1990).

For example, amongst white people, black women's sexuality is often thought of as dirty, immoral, uncontrolled, bestial, loose, promiscuous, and they are often seen as prostitutes (Marshall, 1996). Institutionalised racism pervades education, for example,

in schools where children are taught that Columbus *discovered* America as if no-one was already there (hooks, 1982). In film, white people continue to be seen as 'shedding light' (read truth, knowledge, civilisation) into the 'dark' (read savage, mysterious) corners of the world' (Young, 1996: 175). Colonial discourse continues in an allegedly 'post'-colonial age. Afshar (1994) points to the particular difficulties of Muslim girls in school. For example, they are encouraged by parents to respect teachers and to work hard. They therefore fail to mention racism in the curriculum or by other children or teachers because they seek the respect of teachers and to form the impression that school life is proceeding smoothly to please their parents. The appalling treatment of refugees and immigrants also continues long after Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech and in an allegedly multiracial contemporary western society. We still hear dramatic language which is used to insight fear and hatred: 'swamp', 'wave', 'deluge', 'flood', 'tide' and other watery metaphors create fear and panic as if immigrants are coming over the seas in their 'hordes' and 'masses' and will 'invade' and suffocate 'us' by sheer weight of numbers (Cheney, 1996).

Multiracial feminists are concerned that much feminist research and theorising has been insensitive to 'race', for example, through biased sampling procedures. Cannon, Higginbotham and Leung (1988) note that black and working class women often do not reply to research recruitment requests as readily as white, middle class women and that obtaining an unbiased sample may involve a great deal of more personal contact with these groups. However, racism has also often been more explicit (Collins, 1991; Ware, 1992). Black feminists, for example, are concerned that white feminists have ignored or silenced black voices or even hijacked black issues and made out their plight is synonymous as in the expressions 'Woman as Slave' and 'The Third World of Women' (hooks, 1982). hooks also points out that black women have often been seen as passive women who are interested only in race issues, which fails to acknowledge that the women's movement has hardly been an inviting place to be given its ignorances, its racial and class composition, and its fear of diluting its already silenced voice and identity through encouraging dissonant voices.

Much multiracial feminism has its roots in socialist feminism but with a greater focus on 'race' and other social axes than has traditionally been afforded them, as well as gender and class. Such axes are seen as interrelated but semiautonomous. In other

words, rather than gender being seen as either autonomous and singularly important (as with radical feminism - 2.3), or subsumed under class difference (marxist feminism - 2.4), it is seen as complexly intersected by 'race' and class, etc. (e.g. Baca Zinn, Cannon, Higgenbotham, and Dill, 1986; Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994; Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996). Men and women are therefore regarded as fragmented and complex groups. Rather than settling for the radical argument that all men are oppressive and stand to gain from present patriarchal relations, or the liberal arguments which often verge on the 'poor man' side of the debate which is occupied most vociferously by conservatives (see section 2.12), it is recognised that whilst men stand to gain much from their current position, there are also real costs to masculinity that need to be addressed in a calm, sensitive and sophisticated manner (Messner, 1997). It aims to build progressive and nuanced coalitions between different groups with different needs. It is accepting of the fact that this may sometimes lead to contradiction and clashes of interests but works with these problems rather than glossing over them and seeking comfort in the excessive and simplistic generalisations characteristic of many of the feminisms covered so far.

Messner (1997: 106), drawing on the work of Anderson (1990), offers a useful example of why it is so important to consider 'race' and gender together: Three black men in their twenties are walking down the street after a party. A white women sees them and crosses over the street and enters a house porch. She does not live there but pretends she does. The black men, realising she is fearful of them tell her not to be afraid. They get out their wallets and show her they are working men with money and that she should not assume they are thugs. She breathes a sigh of relief and they all continue their journey. A purely anti-racial analysis would centre on the woman's prejudiced stereotypical judgements but would be insensitive to the fact that women are genuinely at risk of mugging and rape by men. A purely feminist slant that is insensitive to race would probably suggest the men were highly insensitive to the woman who has every reason to be fearful. As Messner argues, only an analysis that is sensitive to *both* 'race' and gender can account for the interplay of structural power whilst sensitively attending to difference.

Black feminists have endeavoured to make visible the particular circumstances of black people. For example, Lemons (1998) argues that black men often feel

disempowered by whites and feel feminised. They then seek to over-emphasise their masculinity as a compensatory measure. Many black men are keen to eradicate racial prejudice and be equal with 'white man' but continue to ignore the/ir oppression of women. Black women are also often complicit with black male oppression, tolerating it because they see it as understandable anger resulting from the frustrations of racial oppression (hooks, 2000). Both black and white men may have in common the fact that many of them oppress women, and black and white women often suffer the results, but clearly there are particular circumstances that need to be addressed in a manner that is sensitive to subtle matrices of power. Other work within black feminism has focussed on improving provisions and empowering black women using psychiatric services (Wheeler, 1994) and the empowerment of black women through some black female rapper's explicit reference to their sexuality and their refusal to fit (white) heterosexual men's expectations of 'civilised' politeness and objectified status (Skeggs, 1994). Similarly, amongst other groups, the particular circumstances of Mexican-American women (García, 1997) and American-Indian women (Gunn Allen, 2001) have been studied.

Just as some radical feminists have pointed out that whilst homosexuality has been a research target, heterosexuality has remained unreconstructed (2.3), some multiracial feminists have pointed out how even in work interested in 'race', 'blacks' have been studied as exotically 'different' whilst leaving 'whites' unexamined and taken for granted. In other words, normative foundations are being used to measure Others against (Spelman, 1988). Whiteness has recently begun to be deconstructed, particularly by those inspired by social constructionism (2.11). For example, Frankenberg (1993) looks at the life histories of white women and shows how 'whiteness' changes over time and is therefore not an essence. Whites often speak as if race and colonialism are things of the past whilst failing to recognise how deeply sedimented racist and colonialist discourses are and how they continue to do damage precisely because they feel so taken for granted and normative. 'Power-evasive' repertoires are used, whereby racism is taken to mean individual agentic acts ('repertoires' are discussed in section 3.4). This absolves the speaker from responsibility for the more diffuse and unintentional acts of prejudice.

Multiracial feminism is, of course, not simply an 'add-on' to white feminism and extreme care must be exercised by whites not to simply assimilate its concerns and bring it under the white umbrella. Difference should not be measured from ethnocentric norms. White feminists must see themselves as different, for example, from blacks as well as seeing blacks as different from whites (Spelman, 1988) (of course this does not mean transcendence or lack of reference point but simply that there is a need for reflexivity - 3.5). As Spelman (1988) points out, 'inclusion' of black feminism implies that someone is making the decisions (that person is often white) especially when the alternative would be 'exclusion'.

Multiracial feminism has challenged a number of concepts that have been taken-for-granted by second wave feminism. Concepts such as 'black', 'patriarchy' and 'oppression' have been challenged (Brooks, 1997), for example. The notion of 'black' has been used carelessly in Britain where it refers, for example, to both 'Afro-Caribbeans' and 'Asians' which does a disservice to differences of culture, language, ethnicity, etc. In the USA, the term is used to refer to 'Afro-Caribbeans' and 'Afro-Americans' because of a shared backgrounds of slavery, again glossing over differences. 'Patriarchy' is also used as an all-embracing term that, for example, ignores differences between Afro-Caribbean and White European men's treatment of women and women's differential access to power and resources according to their 'race'. Related to this, 'oppression' is regarded as overly simplistic. For example, as mentioned earlier, whilst the family might be a site of oppression for many white women, for black women it may provide a support network and solidarity in the struggle against racism (hooks, 1992).

'Race' is also a problematic concept (hence the frequent 'scare quote' reminders throughout this thesis) because there are no agreed grounds for defining it even within the more self-assured biological sciences. Sometimes, however, 'race' is preferable to 'ethnicity' which, despite sounding less essentialist, points to more 'comfortable' liberal notions of multiculturalism and multi-ethnic society which obscures continuing structural racism (Maynard, 2001). Afshar (1994) has spent a decade studying Muslim women in West Yorkshire, England and highlights how the concept of 'equality' varies too. In Muslim marriages, it often relates to women's entitlement to the man's property,

and women's entitlement to money or valuables in exchange for men's rights to sexual union.

Epistemologically speaking, the ignorances and ethnocentrism of white and Eurocentric feminism has undermined any faith in 'objectivity', which is shown to be historically situated and partial rather than disembodied, decontextualised and transcendent (Bhavnani, 1994). Knowledge therefore has to be constructed from standpoints and may at times clash with the interests of other groups. As discussed in later sections, there is overlap here with postmodern (2.9) and social constructionist (2.11) approaches. However, multiracial feminists are often keen to point out that whilst a deep respect for differences should be maintained, and they continue their struggle with white middle class feminists to this end, feminisms need to unite in diversity and continue to work together on common ground where common ground does exist (Malveaux, 1990; McKay, 1993).

Multiracial feminism, then, involves many different feminisms which make 'race', gender and other axes of power equally important. They have emphasised difference amongst women and men and pointed to the racist practices of feminism generally. Making race an issue fragments 'women' and 'feminists' as groups but offers a much more sophisticated analysis which is sensitive to the particular circumstances of particular sub-groups. Of all the feminisms discussed so far, multiracial feminism is most valuable to this project, finding a balance between women's shared oppression and racial and sexual identity politics (Messner, 1997).

2.9 Postmodernist Feminism

Postmodernist feminism plays an important role in criticising the white, middle class, western bias of feminism which has prevailed despite a growing concern with ethnocentricity and the diversity of concerns amongst women of different backgrounds, status, and life opportunities (Spelman, 1988; Nicholson, 1990). Related to this, and in common with multiracial feminism (2.8), there is concern that feminism has been searching for universal principles, which is seen as an inheritance of Enlightenment values such as belief in the idea that research may be done from 'a God's eye view', that

is, from an objective point of view that transcends group values, special interests, politics, etc.

Feminism has not easily gained acceptance within the academy because its explicit political values undermine any claims to objectivity. Many postmodernist feminists have sought to expose the unfairness of this criterion for good research by pointing out that, despite assertions to the contrary, positivistic research cannot claim value-neutrality either, the difference being that feminism displays a willingness to accept and address this problem rather than silence it. During the 'climate of perturbation' in the 1970s (Stainton Rogers, *et al.*, 1995), traditional methods and philosophies were shown to be highly political ventures. That politics had often gone unnoticed, was because the work often reflected or helped shape the politics of that particular culture and time, making it transparent. Feminism and other critical movements stood out as 'political' because their agenda threatened to upset the status quo. Through showing that knowledge is shaped by the perspectives and ideals of its creators, feminism aimed to establish a more level playing field (Nicholson, 1990).

However, postmodernism reaches beyond the traditional historicist claim that all research is situated within a particular time and culture. This view only partially challenges objectivity. It leaves space for counter-claims that research can still be objective because it is judged by cultural and historical criteria independent of the researcher (Nicholson, 1990). Postmodernism offers a radical shift by challenging the very ideas of truth and falsity, fact and superstition, science and myth, etc., which, it is claimed, are all characteristics of modernity and cannot be legitimised outside of this historical context (e.g. Lyotard, 1990). Through the ideals of modernity, science has been able to establish itself as an authority in the place once occupied by religion and superstition. With, and through, this authority, power is continuously exercised in almost every area of our lives including sexuality, mental and physical health, self-help books, education, and so on. For example, 'homosexuality' was once seen as a disease in the 'scientific' (and therefore, one would expect, 'objective') *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* for psychiatrists (DSM-III-R, 1987). It was listed under 'sexual deviations and disorders', and words used to describe the 'illness' include, 'anomaly', 'abnormal', 'problem' and 'gender-role disorder'. Yet, in western society, 'homo*phobia*' has increasingly become regarded as an irrational and unjustified

fear and loathing of homosexuals, and homosexuality has subsequently been removed from the manual (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Science is therefore not objective; it is deeply embedded within particular historical and cultural contexts, and timeless, universal truths are nowhere to be found.

In addition to criticising the Enlightenment ideals (Flax, 1990) of searching for universal, timeless and objective grand narratives of truth, and undermining the special authority of science, postmodernist feminism also shifts attention away from the self-contained individualism of most gender work, seeing language and socially constituted meanings as the key site of interest. Feminism and postmodernism are in many ways complimentary, then. Postmodernism provides a detailed critique of foundationalism and essentialism which were failings of earlier feminisms, and feminism provides gender-focused social criticism which has largely not been a concern of abstract masculinised philosophies (Nicholson, 1990). However, as with other marriages of convenience such as those with psychoanalysis and marxism, there are some problems.

One of the main 'problems' is relativism, which poses problems in other fields such as poststructuralist (2.10) and social constructionist feminisms (2.11) and critical psychology (see Burman, 1990; Burman and Parker, 1993; Edwards, Ashmore and Potter, 1995; Lennon and Whitford, 1994; Parker, 1992, 1998), so some time is spent on the issue here. It is not a new idea, of course, being described by Protagoras: 'man [*sic*] is the measure of all things' (Billig, 1991). Realism requires faith in the idea that there is a single, coherent, ineluctable reality that exists independent of human thought. Through empirical investigation, it is suggested, it is possible to 'discover' this reality. In relativist approaches, gone are the old certainties and authorities, to be replaced by multiple ways of knowing that are seen as historically, culturally and locally contingent (Foucault, 1972). All 'truths' and 'realities', including our most treasured and taken-for-granted ideas about the natural world, are human constructions. As Toulmin (1972: 246) puts it, 'nature has no language in which she [*sic*] can speak to us on her own behalf' (cited in Hyland, 2000).

It should come as no surprise that, in an oppressive status quo, a relativist epistemology which permits deconstruction of taken-for-granted ways of knowing and reconstruction of new ways of knowing, should be valuable to feminism. The problem

facing relativistic feminists, however, is that with no final meaning and point of closure, it is not easy to assert new ways of knowing with any authority (e.g. Strickland, 1994). So, on the one hand, relativism is liberating, offering some freedom from male constructed science and philosophy, yet on the other, the very inability to appeal to a final authority is sometimes seen as pulling the rug from under one's feet (Irigaray, 1985; Harding, 1990; Stanley, 1992). As Hartstock (1990: 163) puts it:

> 'Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic? Just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be theorized. Just when we are talking about the changes we want, ideas of progress and the possibility of systematically and rationally organizing human society become dubious and suspect.'

In this sense, postmodernist theory has arrived on the scene too soon from the point of view of the oppressed and at a rather useful time for the oppressors (even if this was unintended - Habermas, 1983). Men and other privileged groups (see Stabile, 1997 in relation to class, race and gender) have already had their Enlightenment. The postmodernist 'view from everywhere' may be just as disembodied, and transcendent or disclaiming of one's partiality and implicatedness in structures of domination as the objectivist and positivist 'view from nowhere' (Bordo, 1990; Haraway, 1988) and may be a continuation rather than challenge of masculinist theorising (Brodribb, 1992). The celebration of difference, in this view, could amount to *in*difference (Lazreg, 1990).

Postmodernist feminists, however, regard relativism as liberatory and useful to the feminist project, or at least a surmountable problem. A host of defences of relativism have been voiced over the years (e.g. Burman, 1998, provides a good discussion as it relates to deconstructionism; see also Hepburn, 2000, regarding its status in feminism), some of which are considered here, starting with the current author's concern about unfair dismissal on the grounds of 'conservatism', usually accompanied by the phrase: 'if anything goes, everything stays' (e.g. Chalmers, 1999 criticising Feyerabend, 1978). The phrase is often used to bully the critical relativist into submission but is unsophisticated and has a silenced Other: 'if nothing goes, nothing stays'. This should give hope to feminists and critical thinkers who are often asking for a very different

world where few, if any, of the old certainties remain and stable universalisms do not occur or degrade before they can do long-term damage. Far from being conservative and politically disengaged, this phrase captures a spirit of ongoing critique and suggests we constantly renegotiate meanings and settle for nothing.

Much of the concern is based around the common misconception that the relativist cannot take a stance; that s/he has slid into a wishy-washy, inhuman, unethical, and apolitical philosophical trap (Edwards, Ashmore and Potter, 1995). Of course, arguing that one's view is one amongst many and that it is not truthful is very different from not taking a stand. Whilst 'hard' postmodernists may revel in for-the-moment, self-gratifying and politically vacuous work, postmodernist feminists do have to take a political stand but without asserting timeless universal truths (and of course *not* taking a stand *is* a stand (Habermas, 1984), making the position and its critique rather dubious and pointless anyway). Being able to see that meaning is intrinsically arbitrary, multiple and contingent, and rejecting objective foundations, does not mean that in *practice* we have to be endlessly charitable towards discourses that clash with our own (Hepburn, 2000).

Shildrick (1997) argues that it is possible to take a stance whilst recognising its situatedness in a particular time and place. An ethical stance may be constructed that is not presented as a universal fact or truth but nevertheless has usefulness in guiding conduct. Yeatman (1990) takes a different route, arguing that postmodernism is a continuation of modernism and as such postmodernist feminists should be free to draw on modern principles such as value commitment e.g. to creating a post-patriarchal democratic society whilst, in line with postmodern thinking, refusing essentialisms, foundationalisms and universalisms such as assuming 'woman' to be a coherent, predictable and stable category.

Another tack is provided by Curt (1994: 20) who argue that 'some psychologists well-versed in the language of textuality ... adopt a "realist" perspective for *strategic* critical purposes.'. Similarly, Fricker (1994) argues that some notion of realism has to be maintained in order to take a feminist stand, even if this is nothing more than a '*regulatory ideal*'. This is a useful point to make as it relieves the critical realist/relativist tension by taking a pragmatic approach rather than entertaining endless

attempts to claim the moral and intellectual high ground ('epistemological correctness' - Gill, 1995) which, incidentally, is ironic considering the general postmodern disdain for dichotomies. If realists argue that there is a reality out there but we always view it through the lens of our biases, and relativists assert (at length and with great confidence despite no foundation from which to measure their own assertions) such paradoxes as 'the truth that there is no truth', is it not time to move on? Rather than being *used by* philosophy, philosophy should be *used to* 'prioritise the political' (Wilkinson, 1997; also Kitzinger, 1986). Fricker (1994: 95) asks 'What does feminism require of an epistemology?' to make the point that feminist needs are prior to philosophy. It is argued that there is nothing special about this; it is a norm in the social sciences. The important difference, however, is that feminism declares its interests in an explicit manner.

2.10 Poststructuralist Feminism

Postructuralist thinking and postmodernist thinking are sometimes considered together and sometimes considered separately in the literature. The decision often seems quite arbitrary but through teasing them apart, some of their slightly different emphases, such as poststructuralism's particular concern with dichotomous thinking, can be explored. In this section, we begin with a brief overview of structuralist theory before looking at poststructuralist thinking which builds on this.

Structuralism was employed by Saussure (e.g. 1974) who used it to forward his 'science of signs' approach, called semiology. Language, in this view, is to be studied without reference to anything but itself. It is a closed system of signs that appear to point to reality but in fact only point to further signs. Looking up the definition of a word in a dictionary is a good example of how related words are the only way of expressing the meaning of a word within a closed system. A sign comprises two parts, the 'signifier' and the 'signified'. Taking a cat as an example, the signifier is the sound, e.g. '/kat/' and the signified is the concept, e.g. four-legged feline animal, etc. Both signifier and signified are arbitrary. The signifier, or sound, /kat/ does not relate in any way to the object; it is merely convention. A cat could be called something else (and it is in other languages). The signified could be very different too. There is no

transcendent reason why a cat is placed in the category of 'four-legged feline animal'. Humans could have devised other categories which place a cat in a very different slot. In fact, depending on their various purposes and needs, biologists, vets, pet-lovers, and gardeners, for example, do. Also, signs are only meaningful in relation to one another. What something *is* is also what it *is not*. Cameron (1992: 24) gives an example:

> '...it is not the composition of the rolling stock that enables me to recognise the 9.45 from Victoria. (Nor, as any regular user of the service can tell you, do I necessarily recognise the 9.45 by the fact that it leaves at 9.45!) What makes signs meaningful is the contrast with other signs. The 9.45 is not the 10.15.'

Poststructuralism, as the name implies, extends structuralist theory. Structuralist theory had taken the important step of focussing on the linguistic construction of meaning rather than looking for truths in an objective material world but it had reduced discourse to a deterministic symbolic system (logocentrism) which evacuated social agency, social conflict, and social practice by suggesting fixity of meaning (Fraser, 1997), as seen for example, in the Lacanian emphasis on the phallus as primary signifier - 1.6.2). For Derrida (1973), for example, meaning is created through the dual processes of difference and deferral (taken together, these are referred to as *différance*). The positive meaning of anything, as in structuralism, is determined partly by its hidden other, that from which it differs, that which it is not, but also, meaning is constantly deferred, that is, any one meaning cannot be grounded by appealing to some transcendental authority such as a god, objectivity, the phallus, etc., for closure. The meaning of one sign only ever points to further signs in an infinite chain of shifting and contextually bound signification.

The transcendental philosophy of Descartes, through Kant to Husserl, had conceived of the subject as present to itself, in other words, consciousness is seen as a unified whole and an origin of thought (Sampson, 1989). In Descartes famous words: "I think therefore I am". This has been challenged by Freud, Lacan, Derrida, Adorno, Kristeva and others who have argued that to presence something is to make absent something else. Derrida (1978) criticised the Western philosophical tradition's valorisation of presence at the expense of absence, and argued that western culture is littered with such binary oppositions, for example (though not all of interest to Derrida) mind/body

normal/abnormal, sane/insane, black/white, young/old and of course, masculine/ feminine. Unfortunately, such dichotomies are not horizontally organised pure difference, but rather, they are vertical hierarchies with one pole socially valued as dominant, desirable, acceptable etc. (e.g. normal, sane, white, masculine) and the Other as subordinate, undesirable, and unacceptable, etc. (e.g. abnormal, insane, black, feminine).

The poststructuralist method of deconstruction aims to make absences visible before valorising the generally subordinated pole and showing both poles to be dependent, leaky and unbounded rather than independent and self-contained. Many long-standing arguments in the social sciences have come to be seen as rather superficial either/or's and, of course, this is a very important issue since the theories we arrive at are bound by the types of question we ask. For example, sociologists have debated the individual versus the social (e.g. Marx and Weber) which has recently been shown to be an artificial question (Giddens, 1984). Discourse theory also moves beyond self-contained individualism and social determinism (Gergen, 1985) and relatedly, the nature/nurture debates that have shaped psychology.

Whilst poststructuralists have conducted an extensive and often more self-conscious critique of binaries, it must be pointed out that feminism has presented challenges to many of these in a less abstract philosophical manner long before: 'reason/emotion' (liberal feminism), 'public/private' (socialist feminism), 'nature/culture' (radical feminism), and 'subject/object' (psychoanalytic feminism). Cirksena and Cuklanz (1992) argue that integration of the opposite poles (women and men both having equal access to education in liberal feminism), valorising the subordinated pole (women's special nature in radical feminism), or rejecting binaries and constructing new ways of knowledging the world (labour is common to both public and private in socialist feminism) are three examples of feminism's challenge to binaries.

Foucault's analyses also showed how the structuralist emphasis on fixed meaning was insufficient. By conducting analyses on the historical situatedness of meanings, the 'archaeology of knowledge' (1972), he showed meanings to be highly flexible across time. 'Discourses' constitute the subject and have their bases in ever-changing institutions of power. For example, Foucault has examined the institutionalised exercise

of power in psychiatry (1973), the penal system (1979), and the control of sexuality (1981, 1986). 'Discourses' are notoriously difficult to define satisfactorily but the concept will appear repeatedly from now on so it is best explicated here. For Foucault, discourses are 'practices which form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49) and 'historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth - what it is possible to speak at a given moment' (1978: 93).

Burr (1995: 48) offers more clarity: 'A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events...(or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light.' The example she offers is that of foxhunting. There are numerous contradictory and competing discourses that are used in the debate about foxhunting. For example, many farmers may use the 'pest control' discourse, arguing that foxes harm their livestock. The pro-hunting lobby may use a 'hunting as sport' discourse, arguing that they have a right to traditional countryside practices. Animal rights campaigners are likely to evoke an 'animal welfare' discourse, arguing that hunting is cruel and immoral.

Each person has his or her own story to tell and can marshall evidence in support of their argument. There is no transcendent rightness or wrongness to these arguments, however. They are all made with respect to other discourses such as morals and rights, etc., in infinite regress in abstract theory, although in practice certain discourses carry more weight and come to be seen as more acceptable, favourable, credible, moral, normal, and so on. This leads us to another concept which has been extremely important for feminism, and this research more particularly, namely, 'power'. Foucault sees power as a relation and as dynamic and diffuse (1978). He refused to ground his analysis in any ultimate determining factor. So, unlike Marx with the capital-labour relationship, or Freud with the unconscious and psychosexual development, Lacan with the phallus, radical feminism with patriarchy, and so on, Foucault's style of analysis is not anchored in such certainties. Foucault (1972) also argues that discourses are neither 'good' nor 'bad'. A discourse that is 'good' to one group may be 'bad' to another and one that is 'good' in one historical period or culture may be 'bad' in another. Whether this relativism (2.9) leaves the work politically stagnant or more efficacious remains hotly contested (Sawicki, 1991; McNay, 1992; Ramazanoglu, 1993).

There are some problems with poststructuralism as it relates to feminism. For example, Foucault is criticised by Hartstock (1990) for his pessimistic view that to engage in discussion about what another system might look like is to extend our participation in the present one. Hartstock is also concerned about Foucault's insistence that analyses of power should be conducted, not from the dominated groups down, but from the bottom up in an 'ascending analysis' of small scale power relations up to global forms. This may encourage victim-blaming by ignoring patriarchy as a critical analytical tool. Foucault's work has also been criticised for lacking an adequate conception of agency. Individuals are portrayed as puppets of historical forces that are beyond their control (Giddens, 1987).

Foucault's conception of power has been criticised for being ever-present, permanent, self-reproducing, and repetitious, but quite contradictorily, it is also seen as something exercised rather than acquired, something intentional and subjective (Hartstock, 1990; Eagleton, 1991). Power is not to be seen as acting on atomic individuals, but rather, the individual is simultaneously exercising and being exercised by power. Power is everywhere: 'Power must not be seen as either a single individual dominating others or as one group or class dominating others.' (Foucault, 1978: 44). Hartstock (1990) argues that Foucault's contention that power is everywhere is problematic because in effect it is therefore nowhere, thus having little critical value. This is slightly unfair criticism, and mirrors the selective representation of relativism ('if anything goes, everything stays') discussed in (2.9). Hartstock loses sight of Foucault's (1972) argument that wherever there is power there is also resistance. Resistance to power is therefore everywhere too. Therefore power, despite its pervasiveness, need not (though it often does) remain invisible.

The 'death of the subject' is also lamented by some feminists such as Judith Butler (1990), because it may undermine the notion of agency. Butler asks who is left to emancipate if there is no subject? Can 'women' be oppressed? In response to this problem, some feminists (e.g. Alcoff, 1988; Riley, 1988) have argued for the notion of 'women's positionality' which sees the identity of 'woman' as discursively constructed (though not homogeneous), whilst being something that feels very real and as such may

be used as a platform from which to speak 'authentically' about experience, instigate change, etc.

However, that subjectivity is sometimes seen as a secondary effect of language, giving the impression of linguistic determinism, is often due to careless language rather than theoretical inadequacies. For example, Weedon (1993: 86) writes:

> 'Meaning can have no external guarantee and subjectivity itself is an effect of discourse. If language is the site where meaningful experience is constituted, then language also determines how we perceive possibilities of change.'

It is unsurprising that language used in poststructuralist work occasionally slips into familiar and taken-for-granted binaries such as cause/effect and agency/determinism when dealing with difficult and counter-intuitive concepts. Indeed, elsewhere Weedon (1993: 106) states:

> 'As individuals we are not the mere objects of language but the sites of discursive struggle'.

Within a few sentences on the same page, however, there is a return to the idea that language acts on the subject:

> 'A poststructuralist position on subjectivity and consciousness relativizes the individual's sense of herself by making it an effect of discourse.'

A great deal of effort has been put into using appropriate language in the current project but it is easy to slip up. At this juncture it is therefore worth pointing out that the present author's stance is that there is no transcendental subject standing outside of, causing, or caused by, discourse for they are one and the same 'thing' without membrane, limit, synapse, or cleavage (Derrida, 1978; Shildrick, 1997).

It is often (rightly) pointed out that most of the authorities in this field are male (Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Saussure, and so on), and sometimes argued that the theory itself is male-centred (Scholes, 1987; Brodzki and Schenck, 1989; Kauffman, 1989). As Weedon (1993) argues though, the sex of the author and their political

commitment to feminism or not should take second place to the utility of the theory for feminism (see also Braidotti, 1991, on Derrida). If applied appropriately, poststructuralism does offer a useful theory for many reasons. It theorises the relationships between language, subjectivity, social organisation and power and unlike humanism, which regards the subject as conscious, knowing, unified and rational, poststructuralism views the subject as disunified, fragmented, in conflict, protean, multiple, and very importantly, as non-essential and changeable. The psychoanalytic influence of Freud and Lacan is clear, for example, in terms of fragmentation of the subject, but its concepts are often jettisoned, as they generally are in this project, without seriously affecting other more useful concepts.

Having looked at the theoretical and philosophical contribution of poststructuralism, an example can be offered of feminist poststructuralism in practice. Lees (1993) deconstructs the familiar stereotype of males and females: 'male-as-independent' and 'female-as-dependent'. She argues, for example, that heterosexual men objectify women as sex objects to be conquered whilst claiming independence through military discourses: 'erector launchers', 'more bang for your buck', 'deep penetration', 'soft lay downs', etc. Though Lees does not make a point of it, such discourses are highly situated historically, obviously belonging to the modern era of warfare. Women are also sexually objectified in more enduring terms such as body parts, e.g. 'big tits', 'ginger minge', or in terms of food, e.g. 'sweetie', 'sugar', 'tasty', or as animals, e.g. 'cow', 'bitch', 'dog', 'bird'. Through all this objectifying language aimed at fleeing the feminine and subordinating women, heterosexual men are denying their dependence on women, for example, for cooking the food, rearing the children, and sexual union. The independence/dependence dichotomy is shown to be a fiction which belies category leakiness and inter-dependence of the two poles.

2.11 Feminism and the Social Construction of Gender

By way of separate critique of individual theories of gender in Chapter 1, and critical and feminist approaches in this chapter, we have arrived at the social constructionist feminist approach utilised here. This section will therefore serve as a summary of critical theoretical concepts and points made above and brings them together more

concisely. Empirical work in the field is discussed in the study chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) as it relates to the individual studies. Social constructionist feminism is influenced by, and overlaps with, *post*structuralism, *post*modernism and *post*colonialism. It is therefore sometimes referred to as 'postfeminism' (Brooks, 1997), a term avoided here as, confusingly, it also refers to the current political backlash (discussed in the following section, 2.12) where many people feel there is no longer any need for feminism.

Social constructionist feminism has a concern for pluralism and giving voice to local, indigenous politics and power relations, and conversely, to reflexively address the white, Western, middle class, mainly northern hemispherical bias rife in much second-wave feminism. There is a concern with complexity and contradiction rather than simplistic large scale manifestos. There is also a resistance to closure of definition and usually an acceptance that 'truth' does not exist. Social constructionist feminism examines diffuse rather than concentrated forms of power, owing more to Foucault, for example, than Marx. Gender is recognised as only one social dimension of power, along with class, age, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, and other identities. Individuals are therefore very different, leading to deep suspicion of universal grand narratives such as earlier forms of psychoanalysis.

Second wave feminism's humanistic search for a common identity amongst women is seen as a totalitarian, even dangerous, endeavour (Brooks, 1997) if it is unqualified. Gender has come to be seen as highly fragmented. The idea of multiple genders is not new, however (e.g. Tolson, 1979), and has not gained ground quickly, particularly regarding non-additive theories that see social axes such as class and 'race' as inseparable from gender rather than 'add-ons'. One only has to look at Spelman's (1988:175) language as she tried to promote the idea. She is also clearly concerned that readers will feel it is a threat to feminism:

> '...in an important sense there are a variety of genders...I find myself backing away from this even as I say it, and I suspect many readers do too...The notion of many genders also may seem repellent because it appears to make feminism unwieldy and maybe even incoherent.'

The idea of multiple genders is a very important one. Messner (1997) describes how at one of the first National Conferences on Men and Masculinity, following a powerful speech by a feminist man who urged men to renounce masculinity and male privilege, a black man stood up and angrily made the point that in a white supremacist society he had never had the chance to *be* a man. This was followed by a gay man's voicing of his concern that as a gay man he did not have a problem crying and hugging other men and that these hang-ups are specific problems for heterosexual men.

It has become increasingly common, therefore, to refer to multiple 'masculinities' and 'femininities' (Connell, 1987, 1995; Spelman, 1988; Hearn and Collinson, 1994; Segal, 1997). Masculinities need to be examined, for example, as they intersect with other axes of difference such as 'race' and ethnicity (Mercia and Julien, 1988; Gordon, 1993; Afshar and Maynard, 1994), variations in health and life expectancy in marginalized groups (Staples, 1995), bodily facility (Gerschick and Miller, 1995; Shakespeare, 1999), religious persuasion (Brod, 1994), homelessness (Nonn, 1995), age (Thompson, 1994), violent and pacifist men, interest in education and learning, size, height and shape, and humour (Collinson, 1988; Hearn and Collinson, 1994), and so on. Likewise, femininities must be studied in all of their complexity, for example, national identity (Smyth, 1993), age (Gannon, 1999), sexuality (Kitzinger, 1987), subcultures such as the 'ladettes' (Whelehan, 2000), 'race' (Bhavnani and Coulson, 2001), etc.

The recognition of difference has brought with it discomfort over the categories 'woman' and 'man' ('woman' is concentrated on here), which may impose theoretical unity over empirical plurality (Spelman, 1988; Flax, 1990; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Probyn, 1992; Weedon, 1993). Many feminists (e.g. Kristeva, 1984; Riley, 1988) argue, however, that the category 'women' should be retained, despite its problems, as a political tool without attributing ontological soundness and unified definitional integrity to the term. This will always be contradictory, as Riley (1988: 112) points out:

> '...it is compatible to suggest that 'women' don't exist - whilst maintaining a politics of 'as if they existed' - since the world behaves as if they unambiguously did... Such challenges to 'how women are' can throw sand in the eyes of the founding categorisations and attributions, ideally disorientating them. But the risk here is always that the very iteration of the afflicted category serves, maliciously, not to undo it but to underwrite it.'

As Riley (1988) reminds us, the category of 'woman' has been used to progressive and very important ends, for example, in screening for breast cancer or campaigning for the woman's right to vote. The category of 'man' has been useful too. It has, for example, provided a visible and defined opposition for feminism, and a target for advice about testicular cancer. It is not helpful, therefore, to totally dispense with the biological categories but we must remain ever vigilant as to what purposes their usage may serve. As Spelman (1988: 186) puts it:

> 'I am not saying that we ought never to think about or refer to women "as women" or to men "as men". I am only insisting that whenever we do that we remember which women and which men we are thinking about.', and (p187), '...though all women are women, no woman is only a woman'

Concern has been expressed in some quarters that the postmodern shift toward examining difference, between masculinities in particular, could be used to divert attention from men's continued oppression of women (Orkin, 1993). It has therefore become more popular recently to view men as belonging to a group that oppress women generally and benefit from patriarchy regardless of intention, whilst recognising that men have differential investments and stand to gain (or lose) unequally from the patriarchal dividend (Ramazanoglu, 1989; Hearn and Collinson, 1994; Connell, 1995; Messner, 1997).

The post/structuralist influence can be seen here. Whilst this project advocates *ad nauseam* a move away from essentialism, it will continue to refer to 'men's talk' and 'women's talk' and sex-identifying participants' names, etc. in the study chapters (4, 5, and 6). However, this is not to reify the categories by suggesting women or men say this or that *inevitably because* of their biological embodiment or an immutable social demarcation. Causation is an inappropriate way of viewing discourses as the individual both speaks and is spoken by them (3.3, 3.4). Yet, it remains important to identify men and women as such to make sense of any *current* (changeable) differences in their talk. Even where men and women utilise similar discourses, it remains necessary to identify the speakers as men and women if only to make the point that they are indeed 'similar'.

Erasure of reference to bodies and a focus *solely* on language could be valuable in combating essentialism but can be limited when it comes to analyses of power in a social world where bodies continue to provide a powerful focal point for differential legitimacy, acceptability, etc. of discourse and practice. In other words, 'what language achieves' continues to depend to a large extent on 'where it comes from' (its most recent author) for academics as well as culture more generally, even though abstractly there is no such thing as an 'originary author' of language (Derrida, 1978). Despite these problems, the study of internet language problematises the focus on bodies and identities (Chapter 6) and there is a case for focusing solely on language in some research. Chapters 4 and 5, however, do retain some notion of the person doing the speaking. Clearly, there is sometimes a need for a dual and contradictory approach to the categories 'man' and 'woman' where they continue to be employed whilst being deconstructed through their critical use. As Derrida (1978: 284) puts it when describing Levi-Strauss' structuralist technique of *bricolage*:

> 'Levi-Strauss will always remain faithful to this double intention: to preserve as an instrument something whose truth-value he criticises... [He conserves] all these old concepts within the domain of empirical discovery while here and there denouncing their limits, treating them as tools which can still be used. No longer is any truth-value attributed to them; there is a readiness to abandon them, if necessary, should other instruments appear more useful. In the meantime, their relative efficacy is exploited, and they are employed to destroy the old machinery to which they belong and of which they themselves are pieces.'

Butler (1992: 17) puts it similarly:

> 'To deconstruct the concept of matter or that of bodies is not to negate or refuse either term. To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power.'

Another of the major theoretical stances in feminist social constructionist approach is that gender must be seen as *performative*; as something that is achieved socially through ongoing negotiation (Edley and Wetherell, 1995) rather than something that is essential or constituted in early childhood. Language is seen as *constitutive* rather than *descriptive* of the 'reality' of gender. As Butler (1993: 136) puts it, gender 'has no

ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (and, of course, that is far from saying it is unimportant). It is only through repeated discursive performance that gender comes to be 'experienced' and feels so 'real'. The idea that gender is socially constructed through discourse marks a radical departure from essentialist theories. This is both a theoretical and a political commitment, since essentialist approaches tend to paint simplistic, stable, coherent, pictures of the gendered world which fail to account for observable fragmented, contradictory and multiple identities and discourses, and leave no space for change toward a projected egalitarian future.

Theories of stable and relatively enduring 'bottom-up' biological or cognitive essences, or that we are relatively passive recipients of 'top-down' processes such as 'patriarchy', do not lend themselves readily to change of the present status quo, and do not take account of the ideological importance of language (Edley and Wetherell, 1995). As Brittan and Maynard (1984: 211) put it, in essentialist theories 'it is not men who oppress women, rather it is the 'mode of production', a 'programmed genetic trait', or the 'system of patriarchy' which is responsible', absolving oppressors from 'involvement in, and accountability for, oppressive acts'. Rejection of essentialist explanations allows us to dispense with the notion that the existing status quo is natural, inevitable, normal, or excusable.

So gender is something we *do* rather than something we *have*; it should be regarded as a verb rather than a noun (see also Morgan, 1992; Connell, 1987). However, gender is not done freely and wholly agentically. Particular genders are socially prized, privileged and encouraged whilst other 'options' are ridiculed, ostracised, making 'choice' partly voluntary and partly determined. Power is therefore crucial to the analysis, for it explains how certain discourses come to be regarded as more truthful, desirable, moral, acceptable, dominant, and so on, than others. With exceptions in mind, as a general observation, males, whites, heterosexuals, middle class, etc. are defined as more powerful than their female, people of colour, homosexual, and working class counterparts. Social constructionist feminism aims to strike the difficult balance between giving voice to and empowering these subordinated and oppressed groups whilst paying attention to difference within the groups. The concept of 'hegemony' has proved useful in this respect and is discussed in section 3.3.

Finally, since the concept is frequently used in this work, it is worth explaining what is meant by the often unqualified concept of 'equality', which is not as straightforward as it sometimes seems. Equality can mean a number of different things. For example, for liberal feminists, as discussed earlier (2.2), it is likely to mean finding ways to ensure women get the same privileges as men, that is, the male (and often middle class) is taken as norm. For radical feminisms that argue for women's special nature, change is the responsibility of men who should refuse masculinity in favour of more desirable feminine attributes. Both types of equality conflate 'sameness' and 'equality', often ignoring class, 'race' and other matrices of power. Cavarero (1992) argues that equality cannot be seen as absolute, logical or pure, nor as an abstract homologisation of men and women, but rather, men and women should be seen as 'different but equally valued' (Bock, 1992, also argues for this as well as extending the concept to 'race') and without a normative male reference point. As Scott (1994: 368) puts it, it is necessary to view 'differences as the very meaning of equality itself'. This is the intended version adopted here. As Flax (1992: 193) eloquently puts it:

> 'Domination arises out of an inability to recognise, appreciate and nurture differences, not out of a failure to see everyone as the same. Indeed, the need to see everyone as the same in order to accord them dignity and respect is an expression of the problem, not a cure for it.'

2.12 The Current Political Climate in the UK and USA

Importantly, feminist social constructionism emphasises the importance of the historical and cultural context in which discourses appear. In this section, therefore, the current political context in the UK and USA is discussed (the local context is discussed in the individual study chapters 4.2, 5.2 and 6.2). The current political climate as it relates to gender is widely regarded as being characterised by a feminist backlash, particularly amongst many men (usually powerful, white, heterosexual, middle class), who fear that women are increasingly powerful in contemporary culture (Faludi, 1992). Utilising zero-sum logic, these men, for example, the men's movements (discussed shortly), feel that gains for women must automatically mean losses for men (Schacht and Ewing, 1998). Where men *are* losing power they claim they are victims, whilst failing to

recognise that this is a consequence of changes in an oppressive social order in which they are constitutive agents and where they are used to a baseline power that they take for granted unless it is disturbed.

The idea that society is post-feminist has, Faludi (1992) argues, been around for a long time, especially in the media where it was used in the 1920s. The idea that feminism is no longer needed became particularly prominent during the 1980s (Brooks, 1997; Whelehan, 2000). Margaret Thatcher was said to be an example of women's new-found power, for example. In the 1990s, the theme of women's 'new-found' equality continued, reinvented this time, for example, through the 'Girl Power' of British pop band The Spice Girls. Present power relations are said to be mostly equal, resulting in ridicule of 'old' feminism and the appearance of less 'ideological' and more 'common-sense' 'new feminisms' which have sprung up alongside 'New Labour', the 'New Right' and so on.

Whelehan (2000) argues that these new feminisms are ignorant of structural and institutional inequality, seek to recapture the individual's private domestic sphere from, as they see it, the politicisation and panoptical gaze of prying and interfering traditional feminists, and have a certain amnesia about past achievements of feminism which were fought hard for. Riley's (2001) study of the talk of Scottish male interviewees shows that some men are also constructing feminism as unnecessary and intolerable in what they suggest is a 'gender-neutral' culture. Whilst passing themselves off as 'non-sexist' and all for the deterioration of forced gender difference, they absented recognition of continuing inequalities. This dissociation and amnesia, of course, is nothing new. As Spender (1982) argues, feminism has to 'reinvent the wheel' repeatedly. Inversions and apathy are also to be found in the talk of 'new lads' and 'ladettes', and the media who, regarding 'political correctness' as a gag and threat to freedom of speech, make deliberate attempts at 'cheeky' and 'cute' forms of 'political incorrectness' which acknowledge continued inequalities but pass as humour, parody, and irony. Anyone who criticises this 'does not get the joke and lacks a sense of humour'.

For Faludi (1992) and Messner (1997), amongst others, one of the most striking examples of men's anti-feminist backlash is the men's movements, particularly in the U.S but increasingly in the U.K. too. Two of them are discussed here, namely, the

mythopoetic men's movement and the 'promise keepers'. Through the mythopoetic men's movement (Bly, 1990), which draws on Jungian psychology, men have sought to recapture their 'lost' natural, essential masculinity. They feel they have been feminised by the loss of male bonding in capitalist work practices which no longer require men's brotherhood, for example. Through separatism, male bonding, and wild man tribal rituals, they aim to heal such 'wounds'. These men try to side-step feminist criticism of their power over women by ideologically grounding their 'right' to masculinity in its alleged naturalness (Schwalbe, 1996). Messner (1997) notes that this men's movement draws on a 'loose' essentialism, where there is recognition that masculinity has changed and space is created to permit its recapture, and yet they seek a true, deeper, stable self that has been repressed and bullied into the deepest recesses of their psyche by change. There is also an assumption of a universal masculinity shared by all, yet unsurprisingly, it generally only appeals to white, heterosexual, middle class men who feel that they are hard done by (Messner, 1997). The movement has also been criticised for fixating on the 'costs of masculinity' such as men's inability to cry whilst failing to observe the pain of women (Brown, 1992; Messner, 1997).

Another (mainly white, heterosexual, middle- to upper-class) US phenomenon is the fundamentalist Christian 'Promise Keepers' (PK) movement which began very small scale, with 72 men attending its first meeting in 1990, but expanded rapidly to accommodate over 600,000 men in various football stadiums in 13 cities (Messner, 1997). The movement combines 'family values' and other right wing rhetoric and also incorporates some of the mythopoetic men's movement's ideas, providing another form of masculinity therapy. Much of the information presented here is available on the following webpage (July 2001):

http://apocalypse.berkshire.net/~ifas/fw/9609/promise.html

It has become a massive publicity and merchandising machine that has been criticised from within (ibid.) for charging $60 for stadium tickets rather than, for example, encouraging this money to be spent on the homeless and other downtrodden groups. The PK work ideologically, claiming 'God-given' truths which are therefore beyond empirical critique, and thus setting their needs as representing an unbiased, natural state of affairs compared to allegedly more 'political' groups such as feminists.

The PK, of course, are highly politically motivated and promote an essential, natural, normative version of masculinity which draws on Victorian values, highly conservative readings of Judeo-Christian texts, sociobiological beliefs that men are natural hunters, and degenerate readings of psychoanalytic principles (Connell, 1995). The movement's leader, Bill McCartney, called homosexuals an "abomination against Almighty God" and there is a strong anti-abortion line in the movement. Feminists are accused of emasculating men whilst society generally is accused of 'sissyfying' men, including Jesus, who is portrayed as gentle when he was, they claim, a masculine defeater of Satan and fearless leader. Society generally, and feminists in particular, are accused of negating men's phallic desires and energies (Hicks, 1993).

Women have, by and large, accepted the PK movement without question, even promoting parallel movements such as the 'Promise Reapers' (Messner, 1997) and 'Heritage Keepers' (see webpage referenced above), although see Recer (1995). However, women are generally excluded or sidelined by the movement which prides male comradeship and men's God-given special nature. PK speaker Tony Evans says that women were intended by God to be "helpers" for men, that they were "never meant to bear the burden of responsibility for home and family", and that feminists are women frustrated by a lack of male leadership (see webpage referenced above). Where women are included, they are to be found, for example, selling T-shirts or hotdogs at conventions. Men are encouraged to uncompromisingly take back the power that is 'rightfully theirs' in the family and to have the final word in family matters (Evans, 1994), whilst women are expected to be obedient, to refrain from independence and work outside the home, and to look good for their men.

In addition to these men's movements, and with regard to the UK culture in which most of the participants studied here find themselves, other areas have been studied which support the thesis that there is a conservative backlash amongst men, such as unemployed men doing illegal work whilst claiming benefits rather than doing the childcare (Willott and Griffin, 1997), or seeking 'male spaces' such as playing and watching sport or retreating to the pub (Morgan, 1992). The backlash is visible in terms of the grounding of male power in inevitable biological explanations or psychological differences (Gough, 1998), social necessity or cultural traditions, or jokes about 'bra-

burners' and 'women's libbers' who have 'taken things too far' (Ingham, 1984; Ford, 1985; Dennis, 1992; Morgan, 1992). The backlash is also visible in the academy (for example, Herb Goldberg's *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Masculine Privilege*, 1976; and Warren Farrell's *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men are the Disposable Sex*, 1994. It has often been assumed in 'men and masculinity' research that the backlash is a male preserve. There is much evidence to support this as has been discussed above. The first study presented here (Chapter 4) provides further evidence. However, the second study (Chapter 5) also shows women to be participating. This is a relatively new direction in feminism which is discussed in the respective chapter.

3 Analytical Approach

3.1 Introduction

As has been discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, many approaches to gender, particularly modernist, essentialist and individualist approaches, have paid far too little attention to language, power and ideology. Language is a key site for the study of gender, and consequently, this chapter begins by examining some of the feminist linguistic approaches (3.2). It will be argued, via critique of these approaches, that discourse analysis provides the most appropriate methodology with respect to the theoretical orientation of this work. However, before considering the various discourse analytic traditions, it is helpful to first explore the various uses of the concepts of 'power' and 'ideology', which will have bearing on the final choice of methodology. The following section (3.3) therefore briefly examines the work of Marx, Althusser, Foucault, and Billig *et al.* as they relate to discourse analysis and the studies presented here.

Having stressed the importance for critical and feminist work of the concepts of power and ideology and explicated how they are to be used, the next section (3.4) turns to the various discourse analytic approaches. Although they all converge in many respects, there are some subtle (and some not-so-subtle) differences between them, including the stance taken with respect to power and ideology. Throughout the thesis, and indeed the whole research process, reflexivity has been incorporated but has largely remained a tacit concern. The final section of this chapter (3.5) examines the critical concept of reflexivity, with a particular focus on the issue of 'male feminists'.

3.2 Language and Gender

There are a number of traditions which pay due attention to language as it relates to gender, a few of which are examined here. However, they fall short of at least one of the criteria argued for in the previous two chapters, in particular, rejection of essentialism and universalisms, acceptance of cultural, historical and contextual

difference, attention to power and ideology, and recognition of gender as multiple, fragmentary and socially constructed.

A substantial amount of research work has been carried out on grammatical gender (e.g. Comrie, 1989), particularly on languages that are more structured in terms of gender than English. Comrie points out that Slavonic languages, which mark degrees of animation by case inflections, designate women (and 'cripples' and slaves) as having lower animation and men (and other strong, powerful, mobile groups) as having higher animation. Bodine (1990) noted that when grammarians discuss why we tend to use 'he' rather than 'they' in sentences such as 'If someone's making tea would he make me one please', they defend the tradition on the grounds of gender, in particular, the *natural* superiority of men. Clearly useful critical work is being done in this field. The present work also pays some attention to the fine grain detail of language but is not restricted to this. It also deals with semantics, and, often missing from work on grammar, power, ideology, and an acceptance that scientific objectivity is mythical (Cameron, 1992).

Another field, linguistics, has tended to be dominated by cognitivism. In the 1950s Noam Chomsky argued that we should be searching for universal properties of language. Regardless of culture, children manage to learn language by *rules*. Such rules are evidenced in, for example, young children inappropriately applying them, e.g. adding -ed to verb endings in the past tense, e.g. 'I runned to daddy'. The approach has enjoyed a great deal of popularity but is essentialist in its assumption of universal cognitive capacities that pre-date the child's entry into language. It pays insufficient attention to the social, cultural, historical, and ideological aspects of language (Cameron, 1992).

Sociocultural linguists (Coates, 1986) have pointed out that different cultures not only have different languages but their view of reality is actually dependent on their language. Language shapes what we see, our beliefs and so forth. This view is very useful for feminism. If, as theorists such as Spender (covered later) argue, language is androcentric, women's reality is in large part determined for them by men's activities and interests. Clearly, provided this determination of reality is not totalising (Spender falls prey to this, as discussed later), women can reconstruct their world in a manner that suits their needs too. This tradition often takes a more critical view of language. For

example, language is affected by the social characteristics of an individual. Language use varies according to class, age, 'race', gender, etc. In this approach, the social is privileged over cognition. Here, there is a focus on difference between individuals, groups and cultures as opposed to the Chomskyan focus on universals. Sociolinguistics also generally rejects empiricism and positivism. Instead, a hermeneutic standpoint is taken with a focus on multiple interpretations, something very appealing to those feminists who seek to challenge prevailing taken-for-granteds without simply replacing one totalising view with another. Unfortunately, this approach gives little attention to the role of power and ideology in the maintenance of difference and does not always take a critical stance (Cameron, 1992).

Sex difference work constitutes a large proportion of linguistic research. Whilst it would appear to be common-sense that there must be more similarity than difference between men and women for talk to be possible between them, much of the work has concentrated on differences (Epstein, 1988). For example, Lakoff (1973) suggested women speak a 'powerless language'. They display tentativeness and other 'weakening devices', such as softer expletives, hesitant intonation, and statements formulated as questions, including tag questions such as '...do you know what I mean?', which suggest a lack of confidence. West and Zimmerman (1983) found that in conversations between men and women, men interrupt more, dominate conversation, and do not permit equal turn-taking. Other studies have found evidence for common stereotypes of men as competitive in conversation and women as co-operative (Fishman, 1983).

Unfortunately, in this approach there is a neglect of within-sex difference, which may also be pronounced. For example, tag questions are frequently used by men (Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary, 1989). Power is also neglected. People of low status, including men, display similar language. O'Barr and Atkins (1980) found, for example, so-called 'feminine linguistic styles' in the courtroom talk of men and women in front of those of higher status. Further, these studies are based on a *deficit* model of women. In other words, men's language is taken as normative and preferable, which conceals men's power, blames the victims, and leaves women with the responsibility for change (Easthope, 1986). The approach also suffers from circular reasoning with research remaining loyal to commonly shared assumptions about gender (this issue is discussed in the critique of psychometrics - 1.3). Still further, research concentrating on

difference serves to reproduce the very binaries that maintain gender difference (Rodino, 1997).

Some approaches have focussed on how sexist language maintains inequality. Cameron (1992) identifies two currents of thinking around sexist language. One current treats oppression as a symptom of language and ignorance and suggests reforms such as using the word 'staffing' in place of 'manpower'. The belief here is that people are willing to change their language if sexism is pointed out and useful alternatives can be offered (see Miller and Swift, 1980). Unfortunately, those opposed to feminism are often quick to use examples from linguistic feminist approaches to ridicule feminism. As Cameron (1992) points out, they will readily point to the stupidity of challenging the word 'chairman' when there are *real* inequalities. This attack rests on two false assumptions: one, that we have to choose between challenging either sexist behaviour or language (we can challenge both), and two, that language is unimportant. Cameron argues that anyone in any doubt as to how important words such as 'mankind' are should have a go at replacing gender with something less acceptable and more obviously prejudicial, such as replacing 'man' with 'white' and 'woman' with 'black'. For example, what would we think if Neil Armstrong had commented: 'One small step for white, one giant leap for whitekind'?

The other current in research on sexist language treats language as a symptom of oppression. This approach is exemplified by the work of Dale Spender. According to Spender (1980), there is no reality outside language and ideology. Men have controlled meaning by inventing the self-perpetuating mechanisms and rules of language. Women speak the language of men and define themselves within this language. Men would be disadvantaged if women were not permitted to speak so they make a 'compromise', permitting women to speak but in terms of their choosing.

For Spender, there are two types of language and neither are female: there is male and not-male. This is demonstrated well with the following example. If a woman is called an 'old man' it is assumed an error has been made. It could not possibly be correct. However, if a man is called an 'old woman' it is taken to be an insult. Another example is that calling a mixed-sex group 'guys' is acceptable but calling them 'gals' would be unacceptable. Terms that refer to the male carry straightforward and powerful

meanings compared to those which refer to females. For example, 'master' retains its force whilst 'mistress' has become sexualised and derogatory. 'King' remains positive whilst 'Queen' does not. Masculinity and heterosexuality are therefore the unmarked norms whilst femininity and homosexuality are marked as a deviation from these.

Family names maintain male supremacy too. The child usually bears the man's name. When a man 'fails' to have a child, the family 'dies out'. The effects are far reaching. For example, *His*tory can only easily be traced through the male line with women's *her*story being absented. Another criticism Spender makes is that women are seen as more talkative. All the evidence suggests men are in fact more talkative but the myth serves to shut women up. In other words, women are measured not from the a cross-sex norm of what is a reasonable amount of time to spend talking, but against the norm of 'properly silent women'. Women are frowned upon when they interrupt a man, or dominate conversation, and are seen as hostile and 'bitchy'. Women's meanings and worldviews are constantly silenced and made invisible. For example, mothering is supposed to be natural, fulfilling, beautiful and full of joy. If a woman does not feel this, she might neglect to pass on her view to her daughters (and sons) for fear that she did something wrong. The possible chain of communication between women is broken and meaning-making has to start all over again with the next generation.

Women are also silenced by being told they are 'nagging', 'whining', 'moaning', 'bitching', etc. A women may show a man she works as many hours in the domestic sphere as he does in the public sphere, and that she works just as hard. However, all this is in vain if he replies, 'Yeah but I don't like the *way* you are telling me'. She then has to speak on *his* masculine terms (reason, rationality, coolness, etc) or on *his* idea of femininity (nice, sweet, deferential, flattering) - that is, in terms with which he will have a greater voice. According to Spender, men fear women's talk which is seen as dangerous and threatening to their power. Women talking to women face intimidation and are discredited: 'chatter', 'natter', 'prattle', 'nag', 'bitch', 'whine', 'gossip'. The spaces for women to come into contact with one another have been and continue to be limited. Men fear women comparing notes and exchanging ideas which could threaten their power so they limit women's movement by, for example, expecting them to stay within the domestic sphere whilst they often, for example, go on a lads nights out to the pub, or watch football together.

Spender's work is a useful and often compelling analysis which, in its own strategic terms, 'raises consciousness'. It has been influential in the work carried out here but with very important revisions. The author, for example, often finds it helpful during the research process to use radical feminism as a starting point to prioritise women's needs before considering men's needs in order to offset to some degree the influence of masculinist ideologies. However, as with most radical feminism, Spender's theorising is far too generalised. Neither men or women universally behave in the manner she states and some of the analyses could be transposed onto class and 'race', such as workers or people of colour being silenced, ignored, interrupted and so on by those who are more powerful along various social axes, thus making the assumption of a essential, unitary femininity mythical (Segal, 1987).

It is also important that language is not viewed as overwhelmingly oppressive to women. Spender views language in a very deterministic manner which leaves little room for women's agency and resistance (even her own) whilst crediting men with the agency required for meaning-making. Men's power is not always as deliberate and conscious as Spender makes out (Black and Coward, 1981). A more subtle ideological analysis can be performed using critical discourse analysis (3.4) which looks at how discourses work through individuals and institutions in a more diffuse manner, and how language is constitutive of reality rather than a mere description of it (Gill, 1995). Critical discourse analysis also takes a more critical view of 'consciousness-raising' and relieves it of its more cognitivist overtones.

Though all the approaches discussed offer valuable contributions to feminist theorising around gender, both the 'difference' and 'dominance' models examined here have a tendency to assume gender automatically maps onto biology, that is, research begins with the assumption that 'men' speak 'men's language' and 'women' speak 'women's language' - a 'two cultures' tradition (Cameron, 1992; Hall and Bucholtz, 1995). This essentialist focus always runs the risk of being appropriated by men (and women) to justify continued oppression through 'natural' difference (Moi, 1985). Discourse analysis offers a route away from such essentialism (although, as discussed in Chapter 5, anti-essentialism is not inherent within the approach), as well as offering an analysis of power and ideology.

3.3 Ideological Analysis

The various critical discourse analytic methodologies are more able to deal with the requirements of gender research argued for in the previous two chapters. They take an explicitly critical line which includes an analysis of 'ideology'. The critical concept of ideology is discussed here before considering discourse analytical methodology. Most of the approaches to ideology converge on the idea that power relations are often masked. There are a number of forms of ideological analysis, however, so it is useful to briefly point out some of the major differences between traditions as they relate to this work. This section owes a large debt to two discussions of ideology written by Eagleton (1991) and Burr (1995). 'Patriarchy' has already been discussed extensively in relation to feminist theories of gender in Chapter 2.

For Marx, epistemologically speaking, ideology equals false consciousness. Dominant groups, in particular the ruling classes, have maintained their dominance by ensuring that subordinate groups, particularly the working class, are largely unaware of their oppression, for example, believing that hard work for the state will result in a place in heaven. However, this is a false comfort and the workers are alienated from real worldly sources of satisfaction. In order to bring about revolution and social change through the downfall of capitalism, which would have its ultimate endpoint in communism, the working class would have to become aware of their lot.

The idea of false consciousness is not very popular today, particularly within the western culture of postmodernity and postmodernist theorising within the academy. The idea that people's beliefs, however unacceptable to us, are absurd, stupid, ridiculous, misguided and so on, is unacceptable (Eagleton, 1991). The notion of false consciousness begs the question, who decides what truth and falsity are? A religious person would not feel they were under false consciousness because they believe their god is the ultimate truth. A Marxist would appeal to Marx as an authority. Therefore we are left with arbitrary decisions about meaning and arbitrary appeals to authorities. The theory is also essentialist because it relies on the emancipated person recognising a

true, fixed identity that they can change. Marx's economistic model also leaves no space for language in the maintenance of power differentials.

Althusser, although drawing on marxism, refuses the rationalistic versions of ideology, that is, the idea that there are distorted representations of reality and empirically false propositions. Rather, ideology is seen as performative (see also Austin, 1962). Ideology is to be found not only in ideas and thought but also in social practices. It is not 'real' or 'truthful' but it works through the daily lived experience of state apparatuses such as schools, family and the church and can come to feel that way. Althusser's focus on overdetermining structural and institutionalised control of individuals is overly deterministic, leaving individuals with little opportunity to resist. Also language needs to be seen as practice (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), and practice would mean nothing without the discourses which legitimate and give meaning to it (Foucault, 1972), making the bifurcation between language and practice blurred (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

For Foucault (1972) discourses are, in themselves, neither good or bad. Again, like Althusser, an idea cannot be said to be ideological, or an individual or group under false conscious, but rather, ideology refers to how particular discourses are used by particular groups to serve their particular ends in particular historical and cultural circumstances. Foucault's ideas have been discussed in some detail in section 2.10 and need not be rehearsed here in detail. Suffice to say, institutions such as psychiatry, the penal system and the church have maintained a relatively hidden panoptical surveillance of individuals which has become internalised. The state exercises power in and through the discourses which define individual experience and practice. Power is everywhere in infinite networks, but wherever there is power there is also resistance. That is, discourses are not monolithic; they have cracks and weaknesses that can be explored. Foucault also decentres the subject and moves beyond individual cognitions which form part of Marxist analyses and continue to play a role in more contemporary theorising on ideology (van Dijk, 1998).

Marx and Althusser have painted rather deterministic pictures of ideology which leave little room for individual agency. For Marx, ideology is false consciousness, and for Althusser, it is the very mistaken belief that we are the agentic authors of our actions

in the face of overdetermining social structures. Foucault could also be charged with determinism for his view that discourses live themselves out through individual and institutional practice in a diffuse and infinite network of power. However, there is some debate as to whether he saw the subject as speaking and spoken simultaneously and thus reconceptualising what agency means rather than eliminating it altogether (Sawicki, 1991). Much of the charge of determinism, for example, neglects his later shift of emphasis from 'technologies of domination' (Foucault, 1979) to 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1985), the latter focussing more on how the self can become reflexive rather than dominated from above (McNay, 1992).

There are a number of interrelated approaches which overtly conceptualise the person as an agentic discourse user rather than as a puppet of discourse. One such approach is that of Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley (1988), who argue that ideology is inherently dilemmatic. The poststructuralist influence may be seen in the interest in binary oppositions (2.10). Although dilemmas may involve many options, they are often between this and that. For example, Billig (1988) studied the dilemmatic aspects of 'new racism', where individuals present themselves as non-prejudiced, before launching into prejudiced remarks, e.g. "I'm not prejudiced but...". Gough (1998) transposed this onto 'new sexism', finding men to oscillate between liberal values and prejudicial talk about women's position in society. The men presented themselves as liberal-minded and in support of equality whilst managing, contradictorily, to reproduce inequality.

This view of ideology as dilemmatic credits the individual with some agency. The individual debates, discusses, argues, considers, weighs up the pros and cons, etc. The person is an active thinker, considering the difference between this and that, though of course, they may not always look beyond the dilemmas themselves or at the functions they serve. Those functions are often, whether intentional or not, in the service of powerful groups and individuals. The need for some notion of agency whilst recognising the institutional and masked character of ideology and power has recently led many researchers to see individuals as both speakers and spoken, writers and written, and (usually neglected) signers and signed. This issue is discussed in the following section (3.4).

Gergen (1989) argues for a similar approach to Billig. He argues that we are all motivated to make our version of events 'stick', i.e. to 'warrant voice'. Those in power tend to warrant voice more easily than the less powerful. Warranting voice may be achieved in many different ways. For example, it may be related to status, e.g. a doctor's diagnosis warrants voice more readily than a patient's description of their own body. It may also be achieved through claims of experience such as "I've done this job all my life", or superior mental faculties such as "If we look at it more rationally, I think you'll find..". Other methods of warranting voice include appeals to superior morality, passion for a particular issue, and greater powers of observation. Again, in order to bring together the higher level structural analysis, whilst maintaining some agency, Wetherell, Stiven, and Potter (1987: 60) argue for the concept of 'practical ideologies', which are defined as 'the often contradictory and fragmentary complexes of notions, norms, and models which guide conduct and allow for its justification and rationalisation.' These approaches to ideology are preferable as they retain the all-important notion of agency and by implication, choice and accountability, and prospects for change.

An approach to ideology that has been developed particularly with gender construction in mind, and more particularly, masculinities, centres around the concept of 'hegemony' (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995), borrowed from Gramsci's (1971) class analysis. Hegemonic ideologies serve the interests of the powerful in society by naturalising and legitimating their power and marginalising and subordinating the less powerful. In Connell's (1995) sociological analysis of masculinities, he articulates how the achievement of powerful masculinities leads to subordination not only of women and femininities, but also, of less powerful males who construct masculinities that accrue less cultural value such as 'camp' and 'effeminate' masculinities. Hegemonic masculinities are not 'types' but symbolically represented ideals and norms that some men aspire to, often created, for example, in films such as *Rocky* or *Rambo*. The theory is therefore sophisticated and able to deal with hierarchical organisations of power within as well as between the sexes. It has been taken up enthusiastically by pro/feminist social constructionists and ethnographers who have taken Connell's 'practices' and 'norms' to be identifiable in linguistic action (e.g. Bird, 1996; Willott and Griffin, 1997; Gough, 1998; Chen, 1999; Kendall, 2000).

However, as Wetherell and Edley (1999) argue, Connell's sociological analysis requires some fine tuning, as attention to detail at the psycho-discursive level shows. In particular, the theory does not elucidate what constitutes the prescriptive social norms of hegemonic masculinity. Neither does it make clear whether hegemonic masculinity is a single ideal according to a particular time, place and practice, or there multiple, competing variations. It is also problematic that hegemonic masculinity is seen as exercising its regulation precisely through its transcendental and unattainable quality. Wetherell and Edley's analysis of interviews with a broad cross-section of men shows that attention to the nuances of language use highlights greater fluidity and flexibility in men's social construction of masculinities (see also Kendall, 2000 in relation to hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality and 'race'). For example, similar talk in different contexts can either challenge or bolster the hegemonic ideal.

Sometimes, paradoxically, the ideal remains in place through contrary talk of how hegemonic ideals are a joke and how the individual rebels against it. So, for example, through challenging and claiming to reject the hegemonic ideal of 'macho man' as 'pathetic', some men's language pointed to and bolstered other hegemonic ideals of 'individualism' and 'independence' which have also traditionally served to silence women and men of lower status (Seidler, 1989, 1994). Therefore not all hegemonic masculinities are transcendent and unattainable ideals, but rather, are borne out in the routine linguistic practices of men and often in very agentic ways. Rejection (Othering) of one form of hegemonic masculinity may involve identification with another. Wetherell and Edley come to the conclusion that it is 'more useful analytically to see complicity and resistance not in either/or terms. It is probably more useful to reposition complicity or resistance as labels to describe the effects of discursive strategies mobilised in contexts as opposed to labels for types of individual men.' (p352).

There is therefore a need for greater levels of sophistication and attention to multiplicity in analyses. Whilst the first study presented here (Chapter 4) draws on Connell's work and its appropriation by discourse analysts studying masculinities, the second and third studies (Chapters 5 and 6) also look at the hitherto neglected area of women's contributions. However, Chapter 5, which examines the talk of men and women university students, also involves a shift in emphasis away from masculinities and femininities as primary concerns. Whilst ideology remains very important to the

analysis, and masculinities and femininities remain important, greater emphasis and primacy is given to the (highly interrelated) area of talk about in/equality between the sexes. Studying women and the social construction of masculinity has brought to light how the focus cannot easily remain at the level of individual identity construction in relation to ideologies. Given that many women would have little interest in constructing masculinity for themselves, it becomes necessary to see much ideological gender talk as variously constructing individual gendered identity, the gender of others in a particular context, and gender more generally.

The third study shifts emphasis again, this time moving back to a primary focus on constructions of masculinity and femininity. Again, the ideological analysis here is not particularly concerned with the construction of individual subjectivities, which are problematised on the internet. Instead, it focuses more on the social and ideological effects of the talk. In other words, therefore, study 1 utilises the concept of hegemonic masculinity but studies 2 and 3 mark a gradual shift away from hegemonic masculinity to a greater level of sophistication and with less emphasis on the type of embodiment as a 'source' of discourse. With a diminished interest in individual identity construction due to pan-sex constructions of gender as 'out there' as well as 'in here', and the problematic character of analysing identity construction on the internet, these studies shift emphasis away from hegemonic formulations and eclectically draw upon the other various theories of ideology provided by Foucault, Gergen, Billig *et al.*, and Wetherell *et al.*

Having explored some theories of ideology, it is possible to ask if ideology is a useful concept. Ideological analysis, whatever the tradition, generally alerts us to the reification of particular values and the masking of power. It can add depth to analyses, often without the fantastical excesses of other anchors such as psychoanalysis or a return to the modernist subject, whilst helping to explain how powerful groups retain their social position. Yet, as Eagleton (1991) points out, no-one has ever seen ideological formations any more than they have seen the 'unconscious', a 'mind', or a 'god'. Of course, this proves nothing. All manner of phenomena are said to exist that cannot be directly sensed. Religious people may be able to 'prove' their god exists within their own discursive arena. Psychoanalysts can offer evidence of the unconscious by way of parapraxes and other self-referential terms. Scientists can show

oxygen exists within their own discursive parameters. All require faith to some extent, and cannot necessarily be proven using other interpretative schema. As Foucault (1972) was at pains to point out, however, power and ideology are not empirical 'things' waiting to be discovered and measured, but rather, they are 'practices' and 'relations' borne out in daily life.

The studies presented here will be looking at the ways in which discourses serve the interests of men in particular. The problem remains (that it is a problem and provokes defensiveness is an Enlightenment legacy) that in analysing text the author will be making claims about what is ideological and what goes unsaid without authority. Of course, academics do have authority by virtue of their status and detailed and lengthy engagement with their subject matter but social constructionism undermines any right to assert this over that as a final closure or truth. The present project, then, is an unashamedly political and rhetorical endeavour which appeals to theorists and other authorities within the field in which it emerges for support. This is not unlike any other rhetoric, of course, be it a religious sermon, a scientific report, or a sales pitch, but it aims, as far as possible, and without the benefit of hindsight that would be afforded a future commentator, to reflexively (3.5) and openly address its own ideological underpinnings.

The term 'ideology' shall be used in the present project at a very general level according to Eagleton's (1991) conceptualisation as the ways in which meaning serves to sustain relations of domination, often in covert ways. Eagleton (1991: 5) provides a nice summary of six main strategies involved:

> 'A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself.' (original emphases)

A popular methodology for examining how individuals and institutions justify, legitimise, naturalise, normalise, and excuse power and privilege, and present social

change as unnatural, impossible or undesirable, is critical discourse analysis. It is to this methodology our attention now turns.

3.4 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was the analytical methodology of choice for the three studies conducted here. This section acts as a centralised point of reference, with any particularities discussed in the relevant chapters. Whilst discourse analysis is not an inherently critical tool, it has been developed to this end over the last fifteen or so years within critical academic and feminist circles (Gill, 1995). 'Critical discourse analysis' (CDA) is sometimes seen as a more appropriate term to capture this particular usage and to set it apart from other forms of discourse analysis, some of which are discussed above (3.2), such as speech acts, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, conversation analysis and variation analysis (Schiffrin, 1994) (though again confusion arises due to CDA also referring to more cognitivist traditions such as that espoused by Tuen van Dijk). A good guide to the various traditions can be found online:

http://bank.rug.ac.be/da/da.htm#ap

and as they relate to gender:

http://viadrina.euv-frankfurt-o.de/~wjournal/heft1_99/remlinger.htm

CDA addresses (or more precisely, offers the capability to address) the shift away from essences within the self-contained individual and towards language and social performance and negotiation of meaning. It also lends itself relatively straightforwardly to analyses of power and ideology, whilst permitting the researcher some license as to how much emphasis he or she places on participant's orientations and more empiricist and realist notions around facts, experience and reality and how much emphasis he or she places on academic theory and other researcher baggage (this is discussed further in a moment). CDA is ideally suited to the study of how individuals and groups socially construct their world. It can cope well with the fragmentation, contradiction, relativity,

and multiplicity of gender and the language used to construct it and the cultural, historical, and local contingency of meaning.

CDA is a fragmented methodology and as recent debates conducted on the pages of *Discourse and Society* (Schegloff, 1997, 1998; Wetherell, 1998; Billig, 1999) testify, there is some dissonance between two main discourse analytical traditions with different, though sometimes overlapping, emphases. The 'bottom-up' tradition is influenced by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis and has tended to concentrate on detailed examination of the action-oriented nature of speech (see, for example, Edwards and Potter, 1992), taking an endogenous approach which sometimes finds closure in realist and empiricist examination of participant's orientations (Schegloff, 1997). The 'top down' critical discourse analytic tradition (see, for example, Hollway, 1984; Parker and Shotter, 1990; Parker, 1992), on the other hand, draws on post-structuralism and emphasises the structuring of speech and constitution of subjectivities by culturally available discourses (Burr, 1995, and Wood and Kroger, 2000, provide introductions to the various discourse analytic traditions).

Schegloff (1997) argues that good (conversation analytic) research requires the analyst to avoid imposing their own values on the data they analyse and must remain loyal to participant's orientations. Following Wetherell (1998), Billig (1999), and Weatherall (2000), the present author would argue that this kind of ideal of objectivity is precisely what the critical discourse analytic tradition has tried to eschew because it is an impossible task to not bring ideological baggage to any reading (see also Fairclough, 1989) and such 'bias' is better addressed through open and reflexive discussion. Further, the only way of ever knowing for sure what the participant's orientations *really are* would be to ask them and ascribe truth value to their responses. This would, for the social constructionist, amount to a theoretically dubious return to cognitivism and realism, the alternative being an amplification of the problem through additional sedimentary layers of discourse and analysis.

Also, as Wetherell (1998) argues (citing Mouffe, 1992), there is a need to avoid falling back on the idea of individuals as 'originary authors' of their words (see also Derrida, 1978). The poststructuralist line is generally that individuals are both active and passive, users and used, or 'products and producers' of discourses (Billig, *et al.*

1988). Thus, a high level structural analysis continues to be an important supplement. The synthesis between the two discourse analytic traditions, advocated, for example, by Willot and Griffin (1997), Wetherell (1998), Wetherell and Edley (1999), and utilised here, also makes it possible to collapse the voluntarism/determinism dichotomy to some extent. It retains the idea that individuals have particular discourses available to them according to their social positionings of culture, gender, class, age, sexuality, etc., as well as accounting for power, subjectification and ideology, but also, it simultaneously affords some, albeit finite, individual agency and by implication, choice and accountability, and possibilities for change (see also Sawicki, 1991; Pease, 2000).

Importantly, particularly in an academic setting, there is a need to balance professional ethics and responsibilities, particularly acknowledging the more powerful position of the researcher (which is given little attention in the recent debates) with a refusal to be complicit. In relatively democratically conducted interview sessions or focus groups, the participants, especially those with more powerful identities, have already had a voice - sometimes, from critical perspectives, quite enough too. Since critique is involved in much feminist work, and the researcher often deliberately under-voices face to face challenges to address power issues, s/he needs to be permitted a later *analytical stage* (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1997). Remaining within participant's (often problematic) voice may be a conservative gesture (Billig, 1999). Consequently, whilst the present author tries to avoid doing violence to (what will always be his appropriation of) participant's orientations, and acknowledges the democratising benefits of the conversation analyst's attempted loyalty to them, he chooses to carefully balance this with the use of particular lenses that filter analysis according to openly acknowledged theoretical and political commitments.

The current work, then, combines the insights of the top-down and bottom-up traditions; combining ideological analyses with the finer grain detail of the local conversational context in which the discourses emerge. Potter and Wetherell (1987) prefer to use the term 'interpretative repertoires' (Potter and Mulkay, 1982) rather than 'discourses'. Although there is much overlap between the two, and they are often used synonymously, the latter term serves as a reminder that the person is a partially agentic discourse user within a particular context, whereas the former has often come to be associated with abstract discourses that are sometimes treated as 'objects' that are

independent of context (Burr, 1995). Interpretative repertoires are defined as 'a set of recurrent and coherently related stylistic, grammatical and lexical features, including seminal metaphors and tropes or figures of speech' (Wetherell, 1986: 90). Also, unlike 'discourses', which often refer to large-scale institutions, the focus here is on small-scale rhetorical devices and manoeuvres used by speakers or writers to warrant voice and to accomplish specific tasks, such as offering justifications and excuses, apportioning blame, making accusations and generally presenting themselves in an acceptable moral light (see Edwards and Potter, 1992), whilst contributing to the continuation of gender inequality.

In all three studies presented here, the text was initially read closely and repeatedly and key repertoires identified. The next step was to document the various ways in which these repertoires were presented and what functions they serve in the local conversational context. A broader ideological analysis was then performed to assess the wider cultural implications of the repertoires, that is, how they serve to construct gender and maintain inequality between the sexes in the broader socio-political context (2.12). Unlike most approaches to psychological study of gender which fetishize coherence (e.g. attitudes, stereotypes, etc.), contradiction is also important (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Billig, *et al.*, 1988) and noted at each stage. In practice, of course, this process is more cyclical and creative than a linear trajectory of stages, and has many similarities in this respect with grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), where categories remain provisional and subject to change throughout research process. Willott and Griffin (1997) and Wood and Kroger (2000) provide good accounts of the process of doing discourse analysis, and a detailed worked example can be found in Appendix 2.

3.5 Reflexivity

Reflexive analysis has been incorporated throughout this thesis and indeed the research process but has not yet been elucidated as a concept. This section will explain what is meant by reflexivity before discussing the as yet unattended area in this work of the researcher's status as a 'male feminist'.

Reflexivity has become an extremely valuable tool in critical and feminist work and qualitative methodology more generally (Wilkinson, 1988; Steier, 1991; Hertz, 1997). Although at its simplest it refers to self-reflection on the research process in attempt to *deal with*, rather than try in vain to *expel* ideological baggage and researcher 'bias' (Gergen and Gergen, 1991), it has a complex philosophical history (see Steier, 1991). This history is beyond the scope of this thesis but a very brief look is possible. Reflexivity has long been a concern of philosophers who have addressed the paradoxical character of language. Lawson (1985) examines this problem drawing on the work of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida. Nietzsche, for example, asks his followers not to follow him because he deceives them with illusions and untruths. Yet this presents a paradox. If we were to refuse to follow him we would find ourselves following his advice not to follow him.

Many theorists and researchers will bypass such problems as irritating diversions and yet these paradoxes are incredibly important because they point to the wider problem that all language is paradoxical. Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida have all argued that it is impossible to step outside language; we always view it from within whether this be apparent through obvious paradoxes or not. So, for Nietzsche (1968: 522), 'We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language', for Heidegger (1971: 134), 'Human beings remain committed to and within the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else', and for Derrida (1976: 158), 'There is nothing outside of the text' (all cited in Lawson, 1985: 25).

If we cannot appeal to external reference points or authorities, is there any point to reflexivity? Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida all believe reflexivity is actually unavoidable. No text is present-to-itself; all texts contain the seeds of their own undoing whether they are silenced or addressed overtly. Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida tackle head-on the silences of the philosophical tradition. In doing so, their work is thoroughly reflexive - to the point where their texts, particularly those of Nietzsche and Derrida, become so absorbed in self-reflection and wordplay they become almost unrecognisable and alienate many readers. Charges of elitism are a little unfair given the massive task the authors face. Challenging the western metaphysical tradition is hardly an easy task and the alien ideas the authors seek to get across are

bound to be difficult for a generally western audience which takes for granted the common-sense concepts of the western metaphysical tradition such as 'presence' and dichotomous thinking.

So, reflexivity is unavoidable in an abstract sense but in critical discourse methodology it is seen as a necessary overt process whereby the author reflects on his or her texts and position within research process. Although reflexive analysis is carried out within a self-referential language system, this in itself is not a cause for despair. It becomes necessary, however, to be up-front about *where* one is standing within the sign system. This requires that the writer makes it clear to the reader that reflexive commentary is made with reference to the disciplinary, theoretical, political, methodological and personal stances taken.

Wilkinson (1988), for example, distinguishes between two main types of reflexivity. They are intimately bound together but worth teasing apart for clarity. These are 'disciplinary reflexivity' and 'personal reflexivity'. 'Disciplinary reflexivity' refers to reflection on how authorities shape academics and their work. Wilkinson offers the examples of how women find it harder to progress in academic careers and are cited less frequently than their male counterparts. Feminist work also receives less funding, is less likely to make it into the most prestigious journals, and is grudgingly recognised as a peripheral and deviant activity by the British Psychological Society and more generally. Qualitative methods generally are seen as a 'soft' option compared to the 'hard', 'rigorous', 'rational' and 'objective' positivist approaches.

'Personal reflexivity', as the name suggests, refers to what the individual researcher brings with them to the research project. Each person will carry around with them ideological, political, and other forms of baggage. Such personal influences would be regarded as 'bias' within positivist paradigms. Critical discourse analytic methodologies generally represent a loss of faith in the idea of objectivity. It therefore becomes necessary to work with, rather than dispense with, such influences in an open reflective manner. In fact, such investments are often viewed as desirable (Ramazanoglu, 1989: 49):

'Feminist knowledge makes those who believe in the dominance of reason over emotion, and the superiority of rational man over emotional woman, angry and upset.' (original emphasis)

The reflexive analyses presented here will be influenced, then, for example, by the feminist social constructionist orientation of the work within the current historical and political climate. So, for example, section 1.1 deals with the shift toward postmodernity in western culture generally and the theoretical influences on the present work of postmodernism and poststructuralism, Chapters 1 and 2 position the writing within the broader theoretical and feminist context, and the study chapters (4, 5 and 6) pay attention to the treatment of participants and the researcher's influence throughout the research process from interviewing to the analytical judgements made in light of observations about the current backlash against feminism (2.12). In section 3.4 attention has been given to the reflexive problem of the need for the researcher to strike the difficult balance between remaining loyal to participants orientations whilst carrying out a politically motivated feminist analysis. Another reflexive consideration is that of the author's status as a male researcher carrying out feminist research which is discussed below (3.5.1). A reflexive analysis of the position of the researcher and his writing with reference to the academic institution is also presented in section 7.3.4. To take one further example of reflexivity, the interview data in the first two studies (Chapters 4 and 5) was analysed in a manner which involved looking closely at the interviewer's contributions as well as those of the participants and how meanings were intertextually constructed.

3.5.1 Men in Feminism

Men are viewed in many ways in feminism ranging from separatism, through guarded suspicion, to being openly welcomed, and everything in between (Jardine and Smith, 1987; Schacht and Ewing, 1998; Digby, 1998). Yet men have been actively campaigning for equality, whether on behalf of women or in the belief it was in the interests of both sexes, since well before the Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, 1848, which is generally taken to be the beginning of the organised women's movement (Kimmel, 1998). Men have been involved in all varieties of feminist politics. To take just a couple of examples, radical feminism has been brought

to wide audiences by, for example, John Stoltenberg (e.g. 2000), and Jon Snodgrass (e.g. 1977). Andrew Tolson (e.g. 1977), Bob Connell (e.g. 1987; 1995), Harry Brod (e.g. 1987), Michael Kimmel (e.g. 1987), and the National Organization for Men Against Sexism - http://www.nomas.org - have greatly furthered socialist feminist agendas.

There are, however, some very strong arguments for being concerned with men's status in feminism. For example, men are sometimes said to be trying to exploit feminism either by understanding women's knowledge and concerns and then co-opting it and looking for new ways of retaining control (Daly, 1973), or, in more sexualised terms, trying to 'penetrate' feminism, seeing it as new terrain to be conquered (see Smith, 1987). However, there are also very compelling arguments that men's input is necessary or at least desirable. Schacht and Ewing (1998: 124f), for example, argue that '[f]eminist "fundamentalism" and exclusivity prevent the formation of a critical mass that is necessary for wide-scale social change.'

For the anti-essentialist, there are theoretical concerns too. Many tensions exist when a group is seen as *necessarily* different, unacceptable, etc. by virtue of their biology or a common, predictable, and insuperable social reality that maps onto this. Prescriptive and ultimately essentialist talk about men and women's differential roles in masculinity research and feminism is rife in gender and feminist literature. Some authors are very upfront about this. For example, Hearn and Morgan (1990: 203f) write, 'we consider the proper focus for men interested in and concerned about gender and gender politics is men, ourselves' (the female readership are cast as trespassing others through the word 'ourselves'), and they see 'women's studies as being by women, of women, and for women'. Weedon (1987:173) also encourages the 'men and masculinity' and 'women and feminism' focus:

> 'Given the long history of the patriarchal silencing of women, it is crucial that women speak out for ourselves and occupy resistant subject positions while men work to deconstruct masculinity and its part in the exercising of patriarchal power.'

However well-intentioned such comments may be, whether made by masculinity and/or feminist researchers, they prescribe gender-appropriate behaviours and a kind of

intellectual separatism. They also promote the idea that feminism and women's studies only benefit women, even though men as well as women stand to gain from a change in the status quo, and both sexes, in generally different and disproportionate ways, lose in present relations (Rowan, 1987; Kaufman, 1993; Kimmel and Messner, 1995; Murray, 1996; Stoltenberg, 2000).

The view that masculinity is constructed by men, for men, and should be studied by men and that women's studies and feminism should be on, by and for women seems rather peculiar at a time when critical theories of gender have increasingly moved away from essentialist understandings (2.11). Taking the anti-essentialist line seriously means the question, 'Can a man be a feminist?' becomes far less important than: 'Is this particular work, regardless of its bodily 'origins', useful to a feminist project?'. Useful feminist work, like most work, is not, of necessity, a product of a type of body, but of discourses available to the subject, that are obviously related in some ways but not tethered in a direct one-to-one mapping of the body (Ross, 1987). If a subject is informed by 'feminist discourses' there seems little reason to assume the 'gendered discourses' also available are over-determining (Spivak, 1987). Feminism is a political, analytical 'lens' that can be worn by anyone willing to take its aims seriously (Offen, 1988; Grant, 1993).

If gendered discourses were so overwhelming there would be little space for, or point to, women's feminist efforts either, a problem that afflicts phallocentric Freudian and phallogocentric Lacanian thinking (Culler, 1983; Woodward, 1997) as well as other universalisms or essentialisms, for example, the overly simplified idea that language is 'man-made' (Spender, 1980; see Segal, 1987). Such thinking falls back on the sometimes reassuringly simple, but wholly inaccurate, generalisation that men have an essential, predictable and inevitable biological, psychological, social or cultural nature and that this is different from, and incompatible with, the essential, predictable and inevitable biological, psychological, social or cultural nature of women.

To claim that men do not have the necessary *lived experience* of sexism (Daly, 1973; Morgan, 1978; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ford, 1985; Bart, Freeman and Kimball, 1991; Braidotti, 1994; Lorber, 1998) is problematic too. The idea that *only* females experience the world 'as women', that they *necessarily* do (see Rubin, 1998), that they

are a homogeneous group *automatically* more suited to feminism (see Hopkins, 1998), or that men (or whites - Collins, 1991) are automatically unsuited (Harding, 1993; Awkward, 1998), is anchored in biological, psychical, or other essentialisms. If experience *is* seen as a necessary pre-requisite of 'being feminist', it is also necessary to remember that many men have experience of other often interrelated forms of oppression, for example, by more powerful (e.g. white) males and females who 'feminize' and subordinate them (Lemons, 1998), as well as class oppression, heterosexism, etc. (Connell, 1995). Conversely, many women will have experience of positions of power, for example, being white, heterosexual, middle class, professional, and so on (hooks, 1989, 2000; West, 1993). School bullying and working class status as a trainee technician in a middle class university medical school environment where female supervisors and colleagues referred to the current author as 'man Friday' and 'stupid boy' are personal reminders.

Although these issues are very important, they do in any case remain loyal to the empiricist's claim that direct experience of the world is a necessary prerequisite for useful research. This is clearly at odds with discourse theory (e.g. Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1978; Gergen, 1985; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Scott, 1993), and something that hopefully, on a pragmatic as well as theoretical viewing, much 'male' feminist work, 'female' masculinity work (e.g. Segal, 1987), and for example, women's non-experientially led work on other women who have been raped or who are of different ethnicity (see Harding, 1998), testifies against.

There needs to be a space for men alongside women who are seeking [to] change, not just in the form of 'alliances' between 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' (Freire, 1999), but, if we are to really take anti-essentialism seriously, avoid ghettoising prescriptions, and favour the 'action paradigm' over the 'identity paradigm' (Rubin, 1998), men need to be welcomed as non-'honorary' feminists. Further, since neither male or female feminists are natural born 'feminists' anyway, any more than they are natural born 'men' or 'women' (de Beauvoir, 1988; Butler, 1990), or 'company executives' or 'child-carers', but rather, are practitioners of feminism with varying, and often non-gender-related, degrees of success and failure, it would perhaps be better in most circumstances to concentrate on the utility of the work rather than the embodiment or experience of the worker.

To summarise this chapter, then, there are many approaches to studying gender and language, the most appropriate being critical discourse analysis. CDA does not take gender as a given which maps onto biology, or compare and contrast the language of the sexes, as with some of the approaches discussed. Instead, gender is seen as actioned in discourse within particular cultural, historical and local contexts. Universal and deterministic theories are therefore avoided. Critical discourse analysis comes in a variety of guises and these are eclectically drawn upon here, particularly the 'top-down' discourse, and 'bottom-up' conversation analytic, traditions. An analysis of ideology is integral to critical discourse analysis, and again, an eclectic approach is taken, with the main themes being the naturalising, universalising and normalising of gender, power, and gender inequality, and the denigrating and exclusion of alternative ways of thinking, speaking or writing. Individual's talk or writing is also analysed in terms of how the individual presents themselves as acceptable and reasonable moral agents whilst continuing to reproduce gender inequality. Reflexivity is an important part of doing critical discourse analysis. If language serves ideological purposes it is important that researchers examine their own political motivations, identities, and personal baggage, for example. Three study chapters follow, each utilising the approach outlined in this chapter. The first study examines the language used by male university students in small focus groups discussing gender and in/equality.

4 The Discursive Maintenance of Gender Inequality by Men at University

4.1 Introduction

The first study presented here aims to contribute to recent developments in feminist and social constructionist work in the arena of masculinities in education by examining talk within three all-male psychology student discussion groups. With a few notable exceptions, feminist studies of masculinities in education has concentrated on school-based interactions (see Weiner, 1994). These studies have proved valuable in documenting gendered subcultures and the reproduction of hierarchies between boys and between boys and girls within schools (e.g. Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Epstein, 1997). In the university environment, there have been some studies looking at language use (e.g. Berrill, 1991; Fisher, 1996) but these have not had an explicit focus on gender (see Stokoe, 1997). Consequently, the present chapter builds on existing work by examining the discursive construction of masculinities by male university psychology students whilst talking on the subject of gender.

There is a particular interest in the men's perceptions of women and feminism in light of recent debates about the 'crisis in masculinity' (see Edley and Wetherell, 1997), signalled within education by the current preoccupation with 'underachieving boys' (see Raphael-Reed, 1999). Indeed, as was discussed in section 2.12, moves to rehabilitate men and traditional masculinities, principally from white middle class sources, can be linked to a 'backlash' against a cultural climate often perceived as 'profeminist', 'politically correct' or even emasculating. The appeal of conventional masculine ideals within educational settings has also been widely documented. For example, Edley and Wetherell (1997) carried out small group interviews with male students to examine the discursive strategies employed in constructing masculine identities in a single-sex school. Drawing on post-structuralist theory, this study concentrated on the 'Othering' of alternative male identities by the students in order to elevate traditional identities. For example, the 'new man' identity, though used by some students as a strategy of resistance, was generally othered by the young men who identified with the values

embodied within traditional discourses around masculinity, such as sport and aggression.

In another study, Wright (1996) looked at how masculine and feminine subjectivities were constructed in opposition in and through regulation and disciplining of the body in secondary school physical education in Australia. Analysis of interviews with both students and teachers highlighted the way in which the male body was seen as the norm from which female bodies are measured in comparison. Females were not only seen as essentially biologically different from males, but also *lacking* in areas that accrue cultural value and power, such as strength and activity. As with the Edley and Wetherell (1997) study, resistances to hegemonic positionings were evident. However, these were subsumed within more powerful discourses depicting males as strong, tough and independent, and females as fragile, vulnerable, nurturant, dependent and physically inferior.

These studies are invaluable in highlighting the importance of language in the construction of gender differentiation in schools and colleges. However, little research appears to have been conducted on the social construction of gender in higher education. Of the few studies carried out in the university context, Gough's (1998) examination of the discursive reproduction of sexism through all-male group discussions is of particular relevance here. Although the psychology undergraduates were presented with feminist and critical social psychological approaches to gender relations on their degree course, the men were found to utilise repertoires of 'socialisation', 'biology', and 'psychology of women' to explain and excuse gender difference. Paradoxically, the exposition of egalitarian values was also found to be a key site for 'new sexist' talk, whereby the men expressed tolerance to soften subsequent statements which could easily be perceived as prejudiced (e.g. 'I'm all for equality, but...women should not fly planes..') (see also Gill, 1993). This study builds on such research by exploring how male university students orient themselves to contemporary gender politics through mundane talk, and analysing the ideological effects (3.3) of such talk.

4.2 Context

The participants were third year male undergraduate psychology students studying at a Yorkshire university, England, and will have been familiar with psychological perspectives on gender, including feminist approaches. It would also be expected that middle class liberal values which pervade university education in general and the discipline of psychology in particular might focus student attention on *individual* attainment, rights and responsibilities more than differences and inequalities between groups (see e.g. Stainton Rogers *et al.*, 1995). As pointed out by Brendan Gough who co-published this analysis with the present author (Gough and Peace, 2000 - Appendix 4), it is also worth noting that the male students on the psychology degree were 'outnumbered' by females by a ratio of four to one, a situation in which one might anticipate some claims about mens' minority status and vulnerability.

The prospective participants were asked informally if they would be willing to take part in a recorded discussion on gender and gender in/equality. All those approached seemed comfortable with the topic and were happy to take part. The men were not asked about their sexuality, but they all spoke about heterosexual relationships. The age range was between twenty-one and thirty-one and most (except 'Marcus' who identified as middle class) identified themselves as working class in response to a pre-interview question, although middle class university culture may problematise this identity to some extent. This problem is discussed in more detail with respect to the second study (Chapter 5), where the participants oriented themselves towards class more overtly during the interview than was the case here. All participants were born in England and one participant ('Amin') described himself as coming from an Indo-Pakistani background.

The researcher and author is white, male, heterosexual and probably middle class(ed) (again, this problem is given more attention in Study 2). Despite this common ground, however, the researcher had a primary interest in deconstructing and critiquing participants' discourse and as such there were inherent power differentials despite efforts to address them, for example, through conducting a relaxed, informal interview. In addition, of course, the interviewer will probably have been perceived as relatively knowledgeable in the area of gender, creating another axis of power.

Three group discussions were conducted, lasting between sixty and seventy-five minutes. Each discussion involved four men including the researcher. The sample size, measured against standards in social psychology more generally, could be perceived as small. This is a common concern of those used to, for example, large-scale statistical analyses. However, it is common in this kind of discourse analytic work to use small samples. There are a number of reasons for this (following Potter and Wetherell, 1987 and Wood and Kroger, 2000), including the massive amount of data generated from small numbers of interviews (an example of an interview transcript (from the second study) can be found in Appendix 2), the labour intensity of the work, and the very detailed and usually highly productive examinations of the text involved. Another way of looking at the matter is to see the repertoires as the sample rather than the individuals who uttered them (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

The discussions took place in different university seminar rooms. All rooms were quiet and conducive to the intimacy of a small group discussion. The researcher and participants arranged themselves in a close but comfortable circle, with no furniture between them. A tape recorder was placed outside the circle. The discussions were mostly unstructured in an attempt to keep the conversation as much like everyday conversation as possible. Whilst the interviewer did not take a 'shopping list' of detailed questions, he did take a broad outline of topics which was sometimes referred to, for example, when conversation dried up or became too far removed from the area of interest. The topics included employment, education (including university life), relationships, marriage, sport, advertising, pornography, and feminism. The interviewer did not refer to this outline very often as conversation tended to be enthusiastic and often covered these areas without prompting. The three group discussions were transcribed in full. All names are pseudonyms. A key to transcription notation is provided in Appendix 1. The analytical method used was critical discourse analysis which is discussed in section 3.4.

4.3 Analysis

The men's talk was contradictory, sometimes acknowledging women as oppressed but giving special attention to how they are generally relatively powerful compared to men. There was also some recognition of male domination but a greater focus on how men are relatively *dis*empowered. Feminism is portrayed as extreme and oppressive to men and it is men who are presented as the victims of sexual objectification in the media and sexual harassment at work. Further, the view that men have become feminised is articulated, with examples given where men are ridiculed for lack of muscle and presented as overly preoccupied with image. These themes are discussed below with supporting examples.

Masculinity as Stressful

The argument that men 'suffer' more than women was commonly voiced, as in the following extract where the speaker argues that masculinity is, in fact, detrimental to men's health:

> **Interviewer:** Is this a man's world?
>
> **Philip:** [*sings*] It's a man's, man's [*laughs*]. [...] Wow, that is really hard, I mean it's a really, erm, shit, it's like women have got a lot of power but it's not spoken about. Yeah, erm, it's like, you know, you get your feminist people that speak, like, you know, 'this area's unfair to women, we want that, we want that, we want that', but I think the areas where women are in a better position just seem to be gettin' neglected. And after all, it's like, in modern theories about man - he's sort of like genetically sort of predisposed to sort of live longer than women, but it's shorter, basically they're having shorter lives, so surely a man must be like, must have a poorer quality of life 'cus of the stress factor. The stress factor is killin' 'em!
>
> [Extract 1, Group 2]

Philip sees masculinity in the 1990s as characterised by a loss of status and power. It is *men* not women who are the victims of contemporary gender relations, a 'fact' which is 'not spoken about', 'neglected'. Feminists are constructed as biased, selectively concentrating on areas where women are treated unfairly and ignoring the areas where

they are in a better position than men. To support his argument, he makes a vague reference to 'modern theories', as if to imply that his position is not personal but grounded in the authority of academic thinking, and thus warranting voice. Biological theory ('genetics') is drawn upon to suggest that men are naturally predisposed to live longer than women. As Gough (1998) notes, repertoires of biology are commonly invoked by men as a way of grounding arguments in the authority of scientific theory. In this instance, the biological discourse sets up a foundation for Phillip from which his subsequent statement about men dying younger than women may achieve maximum impact - it is against nature. But the explanation offered for premature male decay is situated within the social ('stress'), presumably related to the roles and responsibilities of the modern male.

For Philip then, the health costs of masculinity are being ignored by feminists who are selectively seeking evidence of areas where women are disadvantaged. It could be argued that the male health warning may function to discourage women from straying too far into 'masculine' domains. Philip could be seen as deploying a 'male-as-protector' discourse, shielding women from the stress that *even* men cannot cope with. Gill (1993) documented a similar 'women would not *really* want to change their position' form of accounting by male radio broadcasters who, for example, claimed the lack of women in broadcasting was due to women being disinterested in technology. Elsewhere in the same group discussion, Philip continues the 'poor male' theme, but this time his talk is highly contradictory:

> **Philip:** A woman's, er, if a man shows weakness it's like a massive loss of status, with women it's pathetic or [**Amin** *laughs*] so that's what I was thinking, yeah, [**Amin:** Exactly, yeah] more women'll want to sort of go out and stuff, but like, if it happens to a woman she's, er, her vulnerability is part of her femininity - it makes her more attract.. - she can blend it into that and make her more appealing and it's like, erm, so there are equivalent examples of the other side. [...]
>
> [Extract 2, Group 2]

Here, Philip argues that men are disadvantaged because they do not have 'feminine' excuses to fall back on. Femininity is characterised as being pathetic and vulnerable, attributes regarded not only as acceptable, but also as at times useful and attractive.

Conversely, for a man to display such 'unmasculine' weakness would be to suffer a massive loss of status. There are a number of ideological implications of this talk. First, the talk fits in with a number of pervasive binary oppositions that maintain gender difference and inequalities (men as rational, strong, defined by status, etc. and women as emotional, weak, defined by appearance, etc.). Second, whilst such traditional gendered talk remains unchallenged, it is not employed with the usual accompaniment of pride or celebration of men's position of dominance. On the contrary, conventional gender ideals are used as evidence that it is *women* who get a better deal in society. The talk is contradictory since the 'stereotypes' are taken-for-granted as real whilst being simultaneously criticised for their constraining influence on men.

Feminist Oppression

Across the transcripts, feminism is almost universally presented as dangerous and alienating to men. In the next extract, for example, feminists are portrayed as power-hungry and disinterested in equality in response to a hypothetical question concerning men surrendering their masculinity:

> **Ken:** Keep it as a man's world. We give women a job, like Prime Minister, look what happens to the country! [*laughs*]
>
> **Julian:** Yeah, yeah, I think it's still a man's world. I think the, er, the kind of onus on power is, in general, still rests largely in the male domain.
>
> **Tony:** But I don't, I don't, I mean, saying that it's a man's world, I don't think it'll ever change to being a sort of an equal world. Erm, because, let's face it, if, you've got feminists, feminist extremists, they're not after equality as such as they're after the power; they're after dominance rather than, you know, an equal share, equal rights. And, we've also already proved that with things like Communism that equality's not gonna work; it's an ideal. It's never, never gonna work. So, all you're gonna get is, you're gonna get one, either males dominant or females dominant, whichever.
>
> [Extract 3, Group 1]

Ken jests that it is undesirable for women to be in power, using Margaret Thatcher as an example - no account of Conservative Party policies, conditions beyond her immediate control or the male-dominated cabinet is offered. The focus is uncomplicatedly cast on her gender. Julian lays aside Ken's 'humour' and expresses his view that men are in a relatively powerful position. It is interesting that he uses the word 'domain', highlighting the distinctness of the 'man's world' and its exclusivity.

Tony is torn between expressing two rather different arguments. He begins to say that this is not a 'man's world', but quickly settles for the argument that it is, but the only other option is for women to be in a position of power. Tony's either/or view that power and dominance will always rest with either men or women precludes change since either scenario would be equally unacceptable. To strengthen his argument, he uses two 'supporting' examples. Firstly, he invites us to 'face it' that 'feminist *extremists*' are seeking power and dominance rather than equality. Different feminisms are not seen as having different ideas about how to implement change toward a common goal so much as having different ideas about what relative share of power they desire. The failure of Communism is also uncomplicatedly marshalled as evidence that equality is an ideal that will never work. This was not challenged or developed by the other men, being accepted as a routine point of closure.

In another discussion, concrete examples in support of 'biased' pro-women policies are offered:

> **Marcus:** I mean, look at what we've got here: we have women's only rooms within the university, we have women's officers, a women's-only minibus and, yeah it is incredibly biased, I mean, there's no equality in that at all. I'm not saying some of the ideals they're trying to promote are wrong. I mean, if women want an area where they can get away from some men making immature smutty remarks, then fine, yeah, they should be able to have that but I find the whole thing very, it's like, there's a big conspiracy plot, you know, when you're thirteen or fourteen you're taken aside at school, they'll say, "Right we'll have all the men in the gym and this is how your gonna treat women but don't let 'em find out about this", you know.
>
> [Extract 4, Group 2]

According to Marcus, attempts at promoting equality in the university have alienated men who do not receive such favourable treatment. Although he acknowledges the need for certain measures to protect women from sexist men on campus, thereby establishing himself as tolerant or liberal, he expresses contempt for those who devise and implement women-centred policies. The 'conspiracy' that all boys are educated to oppress women presents a vivid commonplace metaphor which facilitates subsequent critique - it is after all, commonly accepted as a ridiculous scenario. The homogenisation of men implied thereof unfairly judges non-sexist men like himself to the point where the policy of protecting and empowering women can be called into question.

Sexism Against Men

In other places, men are more explicitly presented as the victims of sexism:

> **Geoff:** There's some adverts are well judged and some others that are crap, but you find that there's less sexist stuff now with women. I think it's goin' the other way against, sex-sexist stuff with *men*. Men are being used more as, er sexual objects in advertisements, you know, semi-clothed men and all this kind of stuff. Most disturbing.
>
> [Extract 5, Group 3]

Geoff finds it 'most disturbing' that the tradition of presenting women as sex objects in advertising is allegedly being reversed. Men, it is claimed, now endure more experiences of sexism than women. The victims of sexism turn out to be those traditionally accused of perpetuating it, i.e. men. This strategy of denying prejudice and projecting it on to marginalized and oppressed groups has also been documented by Billig (1988) in the context of racism and Gill (1993) in relation to sexism.

A similar account is deployed in the context of employment, where men are said to be the target of sexual harassment:

Geoff: Yeah. The worst thing I've ever encountered was being introduced to an all female office environment. That was bloody terrible.

Steven: I became sex object at this place.

Geoff: No I weren't sex object but they hated me guts. They got rid of me the swines. They were makin' everythin' go wrong deliberately. So women can be just as bad as men. They were jealous because I were gonna be employed to sort of get promoted in the hierarchy a lot quicker than them - they didn't like that. Not my bloody fault - that were the boss. He should have seen it comin' but he was a *twat*, so.

Interviewer: [looking at Steven] You say you became sex object.

Steven: It's like er, they-they-they, the group harass you. I mean, it's all friendly stuff [**Shaun:** *Interrupts*]

Shaun: You don't know what to do though do you? It's embarrassing.

Steven: It's not that, they don't do it for a few weeks until you're comfortable with it and you know what to expect. There's nothing wrong about it, nothing threatening at all... which is probably what it would have been the other way round.

Geoff: Yeah. [..] This is it. Men are assumed to be more threatening.

Steven: Well, they are.

[Extract 6, Group 3]

Geoff's and Steven's talk presents a challenge to the usual view of sexism in the workplace. Geoff claims that whilst he was not sexually harassed, the women were keen to take every opportunity to make 'everythin' go wrong deliberately'. He feels he was constantly undermined - a common complaint from women working in male-dominated work. He labels the women as 'swines', with all the associations that brings with it: dirty, greedy, smelly, uncontrollable, animal, to-be-slaughtered, and so on. The proverb about stubbornness: "Swine, women and bees cannot be turned" shows a history of likening women and swine. It is interesting that whilst Geoff does not

present himself as having been treated as a sex object, he does not shirk from objectifying women. As discussed in section (2.10), Lees (1993) highlights a number of terms used by men to treat women as objects and deny them their human status, including seeing them as animals: 'dog', 'cow', 'pussy', 'bitch', etc. 'Swine' would seem to fit comfortably within this discourse.

Whilst Geoff presents the women as uncontrollable animals, they obviously have a great deal of agency and power since they made 'everythin' go wrong'. Further, they are furnished with reasonable motivation, namely, that they were upset that he was earmarked for fast-track promotion, probably because he is male. His boss is criticised for not seeing the problem before it got out of hand rather than for failure to treat people equally. Furthermore, the boss also becomes less than human like the 'swines' he works with. The boss is feminised ('twat'), presumably for his lack of rationality, reason, control, foresight, etc. Geoff therefore presents himself as 'oppressed' by gender as well as class and status in the workplace.

Steven presents a quite different experience of the workplace. He feels he 'became a sex object'. This reverses our usual expectations of relations in the workplace. Most of his talk is centred around making light of this: 'it's all friendly stuff', '[t]here's nothing wrong about it, nothing threatening at all'. To see harassment as a threat may be perceived by him as emotional and unreasonable, and therefore feminine. He also claims that men are more threatening than women, perhaps another reason for 'taking it like a man'. His talk could also be seen as making a claim about how women are overly concerned with harassment - '[t]here's nothing wrong about it, nothing threatening at all but, which is probably what it would have been the other way round'. Themes of embarrassment, confusion and victimisation emerge in relation to men's experiences at work, with women presented as powerful and at times abusive in this context. Such reported loss of status by men can amount to a form of feminisation or emasculation, as the next extracts indicate.

The Lamented Feminisation of Men

The world of advertising provided a range of material from which the speakers elaborated a story of male castration:

Interviewer: What about advertisin' - the way men and women are portrayed in advertisin' - any thoughts on that?

Shaun: What stereotypes and things like that?

Geoff: These days [**Shaun:** Mr. Muscle!] yeah, I don't like that one, it annoys me something rotten.

Steven: There's always adverts as well that make women, that women are making men look stupid

Geoff: Yeah, they're not exactly improving women's er, you know, appearance, they're just making men look cretins so they look better in comparison. What's the point in that?

Shaun: Yeah, I mean, it's exactly the opposite of what used to happen.

[Extract 7, Group 3]

Shaun brings up the example of the 'Mr. Muscle' advertisement (a household cleaning agent) where the advertisers draw on competing, contradictory discourses. The man is ironically 'lacking' in muscle structure to show that it is the product that does the hard work. But whilst in one sense the advertisement challenges the usual 'stereotypical' macho man, it reproduces this discourse through the product name *Mr.* Muscle. The advertisement claims the product "Loves the jobs you hate", perhaps reproducing the idea that domestic work is particularly disliked by men, with women as the experts in the field. Geoff is clearly annoyed by the advert, though not for these reasons. Steven's subsequent claim that 'women are making men look stupid' in advertisements is followed by Geoff's explanation of why he is so irritated by this type of presentation. He argues that they are a devious attempt by women to disempower, ridicule, and demean men in order to set up a new, more favourable baseline for comparison. Shaun comments, somewhat nostalgically perhaps, on how this is 'exactly the opposite of what used to happen'.

This theme of the relative disempowerment of men in media advertising is echoed in Group 1 too:

Interviewer: Er, I was just thinking about media imagery and how men and women are portrayed in the media - advertising.

Ken: Yeah this is where blokes don't have the power 'cus you look at a super-model who's female she can be on ten grand a week, a second or whatever -something really daft, I mean, they're on about ten grand a *day*, these top models, and the super-model who's a bloke who's, you know, the same status is on about two. But then again, it's a bit, because what it represents [**Tony** *interrupts*]

Tony: We were saying that today in the lecture about the adverts and the images that used to be the male images [*corrects*] female image, and now you've got a traditional sport, football, and you've got a man that's advertising shampoo in his footballing [**Julian:** Oh, yeah] kit, pushes the hair back and, "I am a footballer" (*laughs*) and then you've got this very sort of, this stance is sort of very feminine sort of flick the hair back, long hair, flowing locks, as he kicks a ball around the pitch.

[Extract 8, Group 1]

Here, the example of modelling is used to invert the argument that men are in a position of power due to their greater earning potential. Ken seems unsure of average earnings, claiming at different points that female models earn ten thousand pounds a week, day, or second, and male models *about* two thousand a day. Still, his point is that the pay differential disempowers men and empowers women. Whilst women are often seen as subordinated by being valued for their appearance, this is seen here as positively empowering. Ken begins to recognise this but is interrupted by Tony.

Tony argues that the traditionally 'masculine' sport of football is being feminised through advertising. It is *men* who are now concerning themselves with their appearance. There also seems to be concern that men who are worried about their appearance are doing it on feminine terms: 'flick the hair back, long hair, flowing locks', and this is incongruous with masculine sport: 'as he kicks a ball around the pitch'. The argument seems to be that male models are being ab/used. Bringing together the discursive labour of Ken and Tony, male models are disempowered through poor pay and feminisation.

4.4 Summary and Conclusions

The men's talk involves complex, fragmented, and multiple ways of accounting utilising the 'men as victims' repertoire. This functions to preserve gender inequality by re-presenting men as *already* disempowered relative to women, and therefore, by implication, subject to more unacceptable disempowerment should further change occur. This 'male as victims' discourse can be added to the range of rhetorics of masculinity documented in existing research, such as expressing egalitarian credentials before launching into prejudiced talk (Gough, 1998), claiming that women would not *really* want to change their position (Gill, 1993), and arguing that men should seek to preserve or 'rediscover' traditional identities eroded by social change (Bly, 1990).

Presenting men as victims can be situated within the context of a wider political backlash against feminism (2.12). Ways of accounting are sought that continue to reproduce the privileges of masculinity whilst simultaneously limiting the space for potential accusations of sexism. To claim that men already suffer from present gender relations is a particularly powerful way of doing this. The men in the present study claimed variously that masculinity costs them in terms of their health, leads to feelings of victimisation and exclusion in terms of university, is the subject of ridicule and belittlement in media advertising, is the object of women's grievances and sexual advances in employment, and limits emotional expressiveness such as an inability to display weakness. The list of complaints covers many of the areas where women are treated unequally and unfairly and where men prosper: health, media, education and employment.

Although aspects of traditional masculinities were critiqued, this did not provoke rejection or reinvention. If being 'masculine' is framed as a health risk, for example, then such a discourse invites one to question the point of holding on to the masculine ideal. Instead, alternative masculinities were presented as feminised and therefore unacceptable. As with Willott and Griffin's (1997) unemployed men, opportunities for refashioning masculine identities were not taken up - society, women and feminism were variously construed as problematic and in need of critical attention. This situation presents a dilemma for feminist researchers - should sexist and/or anti-feminist talk be challenged in the group discussions? In order to address power

relations and put participants at ease, there is an obligation to respect the men's words, reserving critical analysis for later. Yet, a lot of this talk could warrant the voicing of objections and the presentation of alternative perspectives from the feminist researcher during data collection, thereby attempting to institute change.

A non-interventionist strategy was adopted so as not to exploit the privileged position of the researcher, although this created a degree of discomfort when statements perceived as 'problematic' were aired. The charge of collusion could easily be made here, of course, with participants possibly seeing the interviewer as a male ally, similar in background and accepting of the interpretations of gender presented. As Skelton (1998) notes, where men are researching men it is difficult for some men to avoid aspects of communal 'bonding' and associated masculinist ideology.

The analysis serves as a postponed challenge but does not challenge the individuals directly. However, whilst the researcher could explain the abstract notion that it is the particular discursive activities of the person that are being critiqued rather than the (humanist) person as a whole, this would not necessarily comfort them. In addition to avoiding immediate challenge, the results were not fed back to the participants for this reason. The decision was not made lightly and this issue has remained difficult to bring to closure. However, it was decided that if participants asked any questions (a couple asked very general questions about findings) their questions would be answered openly and they would be given access to the data, analysis and conclusions as appropriate. By the time the study was submitted and subsequently published as a journal paper (Appendix 4) the men had graduated and contact had been lost with many of them. Of those who remained contactable (five), none asked about the analysis. Clearly, future work in a similar vein would need to make sure participants have access to the researcher and work should the researcher or participants move on or otherwise become more difficult to contact. Portable contact methods include the use of e-mails and 0845 telephone numbers which can now be obtained free of charge from co-operative telephone companies and are routed anonymously to any other number.

The analysis presented here needs to be read in light of the specific higher educational context. Although the male students would have been exposed to

sympathetic treatment of feminist/critical theories within the psychology curriculum, they chose to reject, simplify and caricature such approaches in order to reinforce arguments about male victimisation. The fantasy of minority status may have been encouraged by the men being outnumbered by women on their course. Such perceptions, where they exist elsewhere, would obviously undermine pedagogic attempts to teach and stimulate informed debate on gender and feminist issues within the curriculum, and fit in with the political climate of backlash against feminism more generally.

To conclude, this study highlights the way in which men's dominance of women continues to be reproduced at the turn of the millennium through subtle and complex ways of accounting. Utilising the 'men as victims', or more precisely, the 'men-as-*dis*/empowered / women-as-dis/*empowered*' repertoire (see also 5.3) provides a powerful way of stalling change of the present status quo. The men present masculinity as feminised, objectified, excluded, marginalised and generally discriminated against. The bases on which women's appeal for equality and change are founded are claimed to be equally applicable to men. They are marshalled as a defensive barrier to protect masculinity from the purported sea change in power dynamics that threaten to delimit, debase, pervert, devalue, and erode it. The second study, presented in the following chapter, continues in a similar vein but studies women's talk as well as men's.

5 The Discursive Maintenance of Gender Inequality by Women and Men at University

5.1 Introduction

There are two main objectives of the second study. One, to examine the implicit essentialism that is rife in much masculinity and feminist research, and two, to offer a practical example of how this problem might be addressed. There is currently a growing body of critical pro/feminist work examining the interrelated topics of men's discursive construction of masculinities, gender difference, and gender inequality. However, the almost exclusive focus on 'men and masculinity', in particular, has essentialist overtones. A critical discourse analysis was performed on data obtained from five group discussions with female and male undergraduate psychology students. Three repertoires were identified. Two of them, 'equality as imminent/achieved' and 'women as oppressors/men as victims' were utilised by men and women, whilst the third, 'women as manipulators' was only found in the talk of women. These contradictory repertoires are read as serving the common ideological function of 'balancing power' through painting an illusory (from a feminist perspective) picture of equality between the sexes.

As discussed in section 2.11, an increasing amount of critical theoretical interest has been directed at socially constructed masculinities over recent years (e.g. Brittan, 1989; Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Connell, 1995; Edley and Wetherell, 1995; Kimmel, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Morgan, 1992; Seidler, 1989). Despite the positive contributions of a growing awareness of power issues and a turn away from essentialism, however, such theorising has tended to focus on how *men* often construct oppressive masculinities and maintain gender difference and inequality, with any mention of women generally limited to discussions of how they are oppressed, othered and abused by particular masculinities (men), or how women construct femininity in opposition to masculinity. Of course, men and male dominated institutions do play a powerful role in meaning making and reproduction (Spender, 1980; Foucault, 1981; Connell, 1995) but

it is difficult to see how gender inequalities could be maintained, or changed, without the agency and meaning re/production of women also (Segal, 1987; Coward, 1993).

It would be tempting to excuse such work as merely having a focus of interest but Connell's (1987) look at both men and women in his book *'Gender and Power'* fairs little better, critiquing biological demarcation whilst remaining relatively loyal to it. Further evidence of masculinity being 'a man thing' is to be found in the American Psychological Society which has a subdivision called 'The Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity' (S.P.S.M.M.), frequently found book covers which depict only men (e.g. Segal, 1997) and titles such as "**MASCULINITIES**" (Hearn and Morgan, 1990). Although much of the masculinity research is a response to a previous focus mainly on women, and importantly makes opaque the transparency of the 'male as norm', what often goes unnoticed is that women are (yet) again being excluded. Hearn (1996) momentarily touches on the problem of rendering women's involvement invisible, outside, Other:

> '...with some usages of the concept [of masculinity], the focus on men might be developed to divert attention away from women, rendering them invisible and excluding them as participants in discourse.' (Hearn, 1996: 203)

The problem of women's complicity with gender oppression is a long standing and awkward issue in feminism (compare, for example, Spender, 1980 and Coward, 1993) and much of the neglect of women's potential for constructing oppressive masculinities or impeding change may be due to a fear of 'blaming the victims' (Fite and Trumbo, 1984). Focussing only on 'men' oppressing 'women' continues to be useful as a qualified generalisation or first approximation for myriad political purposes. However, the view reproduces stereotypes of men's agency and women's passivity. It can also easily slide into essentialism, and suggests a line of causation, both of which neglect the often diffuse character of discourses, focussing on the bodily 'origins' of discourses (see Derrida's 1978 critique of this) rather than 'what they achieve' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). To be sure, there often *are* social constraints on the discourses available to men and women and the two groups generally receive differential and unequal treatment, thus making reference to 'bodies' a continued necessity (2.11). However, embodiment does not have to be regarded as a *routine* point of departure or closure for research,

automatically precluding the possibility that women may construct masculinity and men may construct femininity, and that both sexes may be involved in bolstering or challenging the status quo.

Rosalind Coward (1993) takes a critical look at women's complicity in maintaining gender inequality. Though she is concerned with an analysis of practice rather than linguistic constructions of gender, she does address women's role in constructing masculinity. As she sees it, men and women often manipulate one another in order to get what they want and to cement heterosexual relationships through mutual need and provision. Much of this centres on social expectations about gender roles. For example, one of her female interviewees said she pretended she was depressed, upset and ill when her male partner did not take care of the DIY responsibilities. The women Coward interviewed were also *thankful* for men's *help* with childcare and domestic activities, rather than expecting men to be equal contributors.

> 'Living an illusion is uncomfortable, and often women hover on the point of exposing the illusions of their lives. But most back off, preferring the illusions to the difficulty of personal change. And this is ultimately what I mean by complicity. Complicity is about not telling the truth - to other women or to ourselves - and not confronting men about the areas of our lives that don't fit the illusions.' (Coward, 1993:194)

Many of the women Coward interviewed felt they lived in a 'post-feminist' era (this is discussed in detail in section 2.12). As with the women studied by Griffin (1989), and men (Faludi, 1992), they claimed 'It's all different now'; that equal opportunities had replaced the 'bad old days'. The same old traditions continue, whether it be sexual subordination or continuing domestic responsibilities, but they believe these days behaviour is about individual choice. Many of the women, for example, were colluding with unrealistic ideals of motherhood, such as being expected to constantly provide stimulation, education and guidance for their children. Wealthier middle class mothers often dealt with such demands by paying for music or dance lessons as compensatory measures where they felt they were failing their children, for example, through working, rather than challenging cutbacks in educational provisions or the unrealistic expectations of motherhood.

'Women are rather too skilled at performing such gymnastics for their own good. Not only do they contort themselves to accommodate all the contradictory expectations of the prevailing ideal, but they try to fend off social problems with individual solutions. Viewed from one side, such gyrations are heroic. But viewed from another, they show a failure of will, an acceptance of the status quo, and a collusion with men's expectations of women.' (Coward, 1993: 199)

Given the theoretical focus on studying 'men and masculinity', and men's maintenance of inequalities, it is perhaps unsurprising that empirical work has also tended to have a similar focus (although see, for example, Wetherell, Stiven and Potter, 1987; Blee, 1996; McGuffey and Rich, 1999). Through such work, it has been possible to document the discursive construction of masculinities and reproduction of inequality in a wide variety of contexts, for example, through repertoires of essentialist and normative masculinity in male university student's drinking talk (Kaminer and Dixon, 1995), and Gill's (1993) work on male radio broadcasters who justified the lack of women in the industry by arguing, for example, that they would not *really* want to change their position because they would be working in a man's world, and audiences would not take to their 'shrill' voices.

Other critical discourse analytic studies concentrating on men's reproduction of masculinities and inequalities include work on unemployed men (Willott and Griffin, 1997), adolescent boys (Edley and Wetherell, 1995), and the power differentials between multiple competing masculinities constructed by 17-18 year old men in a single-sex school (Edley and Wetherell, 1997). Again, Gough's (1998) study is particularly relevant here. It has been discussed in relation to the first study (Chapter 4) so need not be discussed again here, except to say, it focused on men who were university undergraduates and in light of the above argument against implicit essentialism, this study involved both men and women in a similar setting.

5.2 Context

The participants were second year undergraduate psychology students studying at a Yorkshire university, England, where they were receiving lectures and seminars on

critical social psychology and related feminisms as well as other, more traditional psychological theories. Five group discussions were held in university rooms, each lasting sixty to seventy-five minutes. These were recorded with permission using a tape recorder. In addition to the male researcher, Group 1 consisted of two women and one man, Groups 2, 3 and 4 constituted three women, and Group 5 included four women and one man. Averaged across groups 1 to 5 the sample happened to be roughly representative of the ratio of women to men in the sample population. This was not deliberately sought, however, with the only concern being to have at least some women included.

Recruitment involved rather contradictory requirements because an argument that both men and women can contribute to the social construction of masculinities would suggest no need for a *particular* embodiment to be recruited. Indeed, the aim of the study was to challenge the previous implicitly essentialist focus on 'men and masculinity' seen, for example, in the first study presented here, and asking for *both* men and women to volunteer could be taken to imply a predictable difference a priori. Yet, paradoxically, whilst seeking to not reproduce cultural assumptions of difference through the recruitment process, in order to answer the question of whether 'women' also contribute to the social construction of masculinity it becomes necessary to study 'women', and to retain the marks of biological sex such as names (this issue is discussed more fully in section 2.11). Had recruitment not gone so smoothly, a deliberate recruitment drive for women may have been implemented, or alternatively, the study could have been flexibly manoeuvred to suit the situation rather than forcing the issue.

It is difficult to determine the class of the students because although some participants have working class backgrounds and others middle class, the university culture in which they find themselves is often considered to be middle class. This issue is explored later in relation to the data. All the participants were white and aged between twenty and fifty. They were not asked specifically about their sexuality but most spoke about heterosexual relationships. The researcher is white, male, heterosexual, and aged thirty. He is probably middle class(ed) by others by virtue of his status though he does not regard the axis between middle and working class, as with that between masculinity and femininity, as ever capturing his complex and erratic personal experiences of dis/identifications and various acceptance and resistance by

others. Still, by virtue of common perceptions and expectations, which are more important anyway, and especially with the status of researcher and seminar leader, there are inherent power differentials that remain despite efforts to minimise them.

Volunteers were recruited informally during seminars that were led by the researcher and dedicated to discussing critical social psychological and feminist approaches to gender. The purpose and topic of the study was fully explained. Volunteers were easy to recruit and seemed happy to take part. All discussions were held within a week of recruitment and some groups immediately followed seminars. As with the previous study, the group discussions were loosely structured to help minimise power differentials and to keep conversation as much like everyday talk as possible. A broad outline of potential topics was taken but only referred to when necessary, for example, when conversation dried up or became too far removed from the area of interest. The topics included employment, education (including university life), marriage, relationships, sport, and feminism. As with the first study, the outline of topics was not consulted very often since conversation tended to be very fluid and enthusiastic and covered these areas with little prompting. The participants seemed to enjoy the discussions with some of them commenting to that effect afterwards. The group discussions were transcribed in full. All names are pseudonyms. A key to transcription notation is provided in Appendix 1. The analytical method employed was critical discourse analysis which is discussed in section 3.4.

There were some difficult issues to deal with in the present research, particularly with respect to the women studied. As Gough (1998) highlighted, and as discussed in relation to the previous study, an ongoing issue that seems to have no easy resolution is that whilst it is important to put participants at ease, problems arise when the researcher responds to politically suspect language by nodding and showing other gestures of approval as was sometimes the case here. The researcher is aiming to minimise the power differential between researcher and researched but in doing so becomes complicit in maintaining broader gender inequalities. However, for a male researcher to challenge the women's talk in particular (and he sometimes did), risks dismissing, silencing, discrediting and nullifying their views - an all too common experience for many women.

Of course, the analysis amounts to a postponed challenge which could in some ways be seen in a similar light. Such problems need not be overwhelming or paralysing (Riley, 1988; Freire, 1999) but they do need to be carefully monitored. In some ways, these 'problems' also stem from the ever-present temptation of essentialism: in this case, concentrating on a 'man's' possible challenges to the talk of a 'man' or 'woman', even though a female researcher may have considered a similar challenge - 'as a feminist' rather than 'as a woman'. However, this abstract theoretical observation would not necessarily be congruous with more intuitive everyday discourses about the powerful status of the researcher who is constituted as a congealed ensemble of discourses 'as a man', in addition to his status as 'someone in the know' as an academic.

During analysis, numerous, sometimes contradictory, decisions had to be made that would have tempted different researchers, and indeed the current researcher, in different directions. It still seems necessary to rehearse the point that in this kind of work what is presented is one reading amongst many possibilities. A particular dilemma was a commitment to anti-essentialism as a progressive move for the *future*, whilst also wanting to treat the 'women's language' differently to the 'men's language' as women are *currently* an oppressed group. 'Going easy' on 'women's talk' for fear of 'blaming the victims' (Fite and Trumbo, 1984) and 'hard' on 'men's talk', or supplementing the analysis with more reassuring examples of 'women's talk' that overtly challenges as well as maintain the status quo (and there were examples) is tempting (see Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1997 on this issue). However, on the other hand, giving women 'special' gentler treatment could easily lapse into essentialism, and for the male researcher, possibly a traditional chivalrous 'male as protector' status. The present research/er, then, like any other, is located at an intersection between numerous personal, ethical, theoretical, methodological, political, and other dilemmatic discourses. Hopefully, the critical commitments of the work outweigh any complications.

The participants were informed from the outset that they could see the analysis and were able to contact the researcher via staff e-mail. No-one asked about the research even though we regularly came into contact around campus for some months after the interviews. Matters are complicated slightly, however, by the possibility that they could have felt uncomfortable asking given the researcher's status as researcher and lecturer. They would also have been very busy with assessments at the time. Voluntary feedback

sessions were considered but participants could have felt obliged to turn up to 'show interest'. Again, this issue is compounded by the heavy demands on time around assessment time and the researcher's status.

5.3 Analysis

Three repertoires were identified: 'equality as imminent/achieved', 'women as oppressors/men as victims', and 'women as manipulators'. Although the main focus is cast on these accounting strategies, other interesting material is discussed in addition.

Equality As Imminent/Achieved

This repertoire was read in the talk of both men and women. Consider the following extract:

> **Melissa**: I think men are getting more feminine now than they used to be. I think this generation, like our age now, I think the lads are a lot more feminine than they used to be, like more in touch with their [*whispers*] feminine side [*laughs*] but I think girls are getting more, less feminine, we're more independent and more [.] assertive and more strong and [*laughs*] everything's going into one big sex [*group laughter*] and the only difference will be the obvious ones [*group laughter*].
>
> [Extract 1, Group 4]

Melissa's talk is upbeat and celebratory about imminent social change and based on a notion of 'equality as sameness'. Allegedly, her generation is witnessing a change in men from being masculine to feminine and vice versa for women. Masculinity is constructed in stereotypical fashion as independent, assertive and strong, and femininity is implicitly defined in opposition. This dichotomous and oppositional stance is furthered through the commonly heard expression 'feminine side', suggestive of a sort of latent essence waiting to be got in touch with, although the talk is simultaneously progressive in the sense that masculinity and femininity are seen as changeable in men and women. The comment is playfully whispered though, reproducing the idea that in

fact it is still not acceptable for men to act in so-called 'feminine' ways and provides a source of amusement. Melissa's talk may be seen as policing masculinity. Particular masculine behaviours (traditional stereotypical forms) are exalted, encouraged, and prescribed, while other more 'feminine' possibilities are being made the subject of ridicule. Unfortunately, whilst the imminent arrival of equality is being applauded, attention is diverted away from inequalities yet to be overcome or the possibilities of encouraging equality through positively valued differences.

Further examples of the 'equality as imminent/achieved' repertoire are read in the following extract:

> **Warren:** ...On one of the courses I did last year we went through this whole discourse of, well, you know, why women should receive wages for housework. I said well, rather than go to university, for the last fifteen years or whatever I've looked after myself. Who's gonna pay me? I've come home from work and I've done the cooking and the cleaning, fixed what's got to be fixed and if I didn't do it, it wouldn't get done [.] and there is more of that - people are living on their own more so I think *men* as well are learning, you know, have learnt, and we're in a period of very rapid change, socially and technologically and I think that is giving a lot of [...] almost like *distance* in gender roles because you feel you're caught between, you know [**Joan:** *interrupts*]
>
> **Joan:** That's why I'd like to see a lot less importance on them, I mean, with the way the world is shrinking and everything else is at the minute, erm, to me, does it matter what sex they are on the other end of the internet when you're talking to them or, you know, if you're e-mailing somebody, it's not, there's a lot of distance communication now and gender is perhaps not a thing.
>
> [Extract 2, Group 1]

Much of Warren's talk could be read as casting himself as a 'victim' (Chapter 4) and as such could be included in the next section too. He presents himself as a 'poor man'. His 'me-tooism' extends to having to forego education for fifteen years, being over-worked through both traditional feminine domestic work as well as traditional masculine roles inside and outside the home, living just like many women, yet potentially disempowered by proposals aimed at empowering women. Such hard lessons, it is

argued, have taught men the problems facing many women who are also overworked due to sexist practices. The talk also celebrates the imminent arrival of equality through 'a period of very rapid change, socially and technologically'. Imminent equality is signalled through increasing numbers of individuals living alone and therefore being forced to do both paid and unpaid, public and private work, just like many women. Change is not so much a personal affair for Warren. He spent much of the interview telling us that above all else he is an 'individual' and anything he does is 'to be himself'. Such enormous changes in society give future change a less personally involving out-thereness; societal change having a momentum all of its own. The talk about individual living also fails to acknowledge the continued expectations of women in oppressive heterosexual living arrangements where choice, equality, co-operation and sharing remain a theoretical possibility rather than a lived reality.

Joan's talk may be read as celebratory too. She would like to see less emphasis on gender roles, which could be read as progressive in some senses, but she prematurely erases gender while it remains a structuring force by saying it is 'perhaps not a thing' anymore in the information/mass communication age (something we will come across again later in Chapter 6). Joan, orienting to Warren's talk about distance, says that increasingly we communicate electronically and at a distance rather than face to face, making individuals anonymous. It is therefore implied that gender inequality is founded on biology and not language use. In face to face contact, where the marks of gender are for all to see, hear, etc., people will be positioned according to their biology. In cyberspace, it is argued, this is hidden from view and unimportant. It is obviously contestable that gender is erased on the internet and that Haraway's (1985) dream in 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' has been realised (Herring, Johnson and DiBenedetto, 1995; Spender, 1995; Zdenek, 1999). Indeed, gender construction was very visible on the internet discussion board studied in Chapter 6. Still, concentrating on what the talk achieves rather than its facticity, talk of dramatic societal changes brought about through technological advance potentially absolves Warren and Joan from individual responsibility and action. Again, as Griffin (1989), Faludi (1992), Coward (1993), and Whelehan (2000) amongst others have pointed out, the premature celebration of the arrival of equality conceals, absents, and makes less urgent the continuing need for change.

Women as Oppressors/Men as Victims

Some comments went further, suggesting that equality has actually been overshot in favour of women, both presenting 'women as oppressors' and 'men as victims'. This repertoire was utilised by both the men and the women. Its use by men has already been documented (in Chapter 4) so the focus here is cast on the 'women's talk'. The following extract picks up during a discussion on what women should do when subjected to sexist comments by men:

Jenny: And the word 'darling' [.] like some-some people go "alright darlin'" like they just don't realise they're saying it but some blokes, have you seen them, go, "Alright *darlin*'" [**Maxine:** Yeah] I'm like urr no and you can really tell [**Val:** *interrupts*]

Val: They're making you uncomfortable. Well some people just say it, some people just say it in a friendly way [**Jenny:** Yeah, yeah] you know, if they're saying it like that they sort of *stress* it more don't they [**Jenny:** Yeah] they sort of stretch the word so it [**Maxine:** Say it sleazy] yeah as though he's trying to put you down. But I can't, I mean, I can't say I've had that much trouble but I think also if you *react* then they tend to do it more but if you ignore it then they tend to drop it, but some people react and then they seem to get at them more and more.

Interviewer: Doesn't that make you in a sort of no-win situation like what feminists are saying through and through that you, that if you don't react you're being disempowered and you're putting up with something that you shouldn't have to, but if you do the men disempower you anyway for doing it and they deliberately make more of it.

Jenny: Unless you get back at them with something worse than they said to you, you know that puts them down [**Interviewer:** Which makes you] and then it makes you as bad as them but at least you've got your own back.

Val: Don't you think in certain situations women can be just as bad. I mean, you hear these stories of these young lads straight from school and they go and work in these factories where there's a lot of women and the sort of comments that come out and the behaviour - the groping and all the things they do, they turn it round. So women are quite capable of turning the tables in certain situations. So you don't want a society where it goes the other way do you and then women are the ones in control and they're treating men in a similar way?

[Extract 3, Group 3]

Jenny and Val discuss variations in the meaning of words dependent upon the tone of voice, etc., of the speaker. Val says she does not experience 'much trouble' from men trying to put her down but the reasons she offers show a collusion with men. Like most talk, her talk also has a prescriptive element. Whilst men who make women uncomfortable and then silence those who challenge their unwanted gestures are clearly at fault too, Val prescribes working within the system, warning other women that to challenge men is to court trouble: 'if you ignore it then they tend to drop it, but some people react and then they seem to get at them more'.

The interviewer tries to challenge the conservatism of not confronting men whilst remaining sensitive to and acknowledging the women's experiences. He sums up the familiar double bind but remains within the status quo himself, pessimistically concentrating on short-term individual-oriented goals ('no-win situation'), rather than encouraging the women to challenge sexism and to see any 'winning' as a long term societal as well as personal battle. In addition to incorrectly singularising the feminist stance, which glosses over variations between feminisms, he also conservatively stokes the expressed fear of challenging men, unfairly casting all men as essentially the same, unwilling to listen to women's needs, as a starting point rather than something to be dealt with where it (frequently) occurs. Jenny offers a reactionary alternative which is recognised simultaneously by herself and the interviewer as problematic.

Val occupies the space opened by this talk of women's latent power and their potential to be 'just as bad'. She suggests that in contemporary society *even* factories (for example) are places where women are now dominant. As an example this is not necessarily problematic. Most people can provide hypothetical or actual examples of women exerting power over men. Indeed, the author mentioned his own experience of being subordinated by female supervisors in a former workplace. It is also progressive to recognise sexism as a two-way street (even if most of the traffic travels one way). However, what *is* problematic is when particular *instances* are used to make *general* points which lament the 'poor man' and celebrate women's greater power. Val uses this instance to air general concerns that women's latent potential for power makes them well capable of 'turning the tables' and could lead to a society that 'goes the other way'.

This fear of women 'going too far', is a conservatism previously mainly documented in relation to men (Faludi, 1992 Dennis, 1992). The language suggests a latent power that women could easily use to invert power relations should they want to, *even* in obviously male-dominated arenas. This alleged potential lets men who resist change off the hook and encourages women to be satisfied that they have a reserve of power should they *choose* to exercise it. On closer inspection the example is not so innocent either. It focuses on 'young lads straight from school' which conjures up images of relative vulnerability, innocence, inexperience, powerlessness, etc. This helps to give her subsequent remarks about women verbally and physically oppressing the men added shock value. The context adds to this. The factory has long been seen as a male domain: man and machine, control, power, strength, 'aving a laff' at women's or other men's expense, subjecting women to verbal and physical subordination, etc. (Willis, 1977; Connell, 1995).

Women as Manipulators

Much of the women's talk centred around a 'women as manipulators' repertoire. The men did not utilise the repertoire (discussed shortly). There is some similarity between this repertoire and the 'women as oppressors/men as victims' repertoire in that women are presented as the 'winners' and men as the 'losers' in gender relations. However, here there is a clear focus on how women manipulate men and rework rather than challenge current gender relations to get what they want. The following extract is quite lengthy but it provides interesting contextual data, showing how the participants orient to each other's talk:

Interviewer: Do you think there are sex differences or gender differences?

Warren: Well very obviously. In a very obvious physical sense there are, yeah. Physical difference makes you react to people differently. If somebody looks different to you, you react differently to them. So there is a definite sex difference between men and women in that sense.

Joan: Do you mean in a perceptual sense?

Warren: Yeah.

Joan: Yeah. And I think that that's changed over time too. That's definitely changed in the way you conduct your life. The first house I bought in 1971 cost me six months salary. I had trouble finding building societies and banks, 'cus I was female, I couldn't get a mortgage. Nowadays I'd have no trouble. So the way women are treated in society has altered.

Interviewer: And yet the biology is obviously the same so how do you think [**Joan:** interrupts]

Joan: It's a cultural thing, the way women are perceived.

Zoë: But there's still a big thing goin' on. I don't know if you've noticed this, like being a women, like my boyfriend [] like don't believe me when I say it, but you know when you phone somewhere up, I'm actually conscious, like, for instance, the insurance company or something like that, I'm actually conscious that I'm actually female, speaking to somebody on the phone. If it's a women on the other end of the phone I don't feel so conscious but if it's like something that's fairly official I am conscious that I am a female, and when they phone me up and I answer the phone I'm conscious of my voice and I think they're gonna think 'Oh it's a silly women', do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Have you any idea where that feeling comes from?

Zoë: I'm not sure. I think it's just [.] I don't know 'cus I think it's quite unusual, beyond being like, you know, fairly young, you'd think that them differences would not be as apparent, you know what I mean?

Joan: I know exactly what you mean. Last March I bought a house in an auction and er I asked my partner to bid for me with my money because he would be taken more seriously. I had a particular price I wanted but you have to be instrumental. It's the same a few weeks ago I actually bought a car at auction. I was the only female there. Women were very much in the minority. But it can sometimes work to your advantage.

Zoë: Oh definitely, yeah.

Joan: So it's something that you have to be aware of. I think the older that you get the more aware you become and to get on where you want to be in life and do want you want to do then you have to adopt an attitude that works within the framework that's there.

Interviewer: And how would you use it to your advantage?

Joan: Well, I have a lot of male friends so if I want to buy something at an auction I would send one of them to buy it for me to get the price I want.

Zoë: I find that, you know on a really low level such as if it's like you want a curry and it's ten past twelve and they close at twelve my boyfriend would have no chance, you know, and if I ring up and I've got a female voice and I just say [*higher pitch*] "Oh, you're not closed are you?" and they go, [*lower pitch*] "Oh, we'll make an exception for you love", 'cus it's men on the other end of the phone. I know if it had been my boyfriend that had phoned up they'd have said, "Sorry mate we're shut", which I know that's a sort of sexual thing in a way but it's just the fact that you're female that they'll make the exception. And taxis as well. I can phone up and say, "Have you got a taxi in twenty minutes?", and they'll say yes to me and to my boyfriend they'll say, you know, "Oh no it'll be half an hour" sort of thing.

[Extract 4, Group 1]

The interviewer asks a general and open question which does, however, suggest a framework for responses in that from his point of view, 'sex difference' and 'gender difference' may be separate concerns. Warren's talk may be seen as observational commentary that people react differently to different embodiments in socially constructed ways. However, it could also be read as promoting a causative, deterministic and essentialist view by suggesting 'physical difference *makes you* react to people differently' (added emphasis). This 'biology' repertoire has been discussed by Gough (1998).

In Joan's talk there is a further example of the 'equality as imminent/achieved' repertoire. Although initially she refers to a particular instance of women's better treatment (obtaining a mortgage), she moves quickly to a generalised contentment with women's position: 'so the way women are treated in society has altered'. As shall be discussed in a moment another contradictory repertoire, 'women as manipulators' features in her talk a few seconds later. She also places herself on the 'instrumental' (masculine/powerful) pole of the stereotypical instrumental/expressive divide between men and women.

The interviewer spots a crack in Warren's biology repertoire opened by Joan's more cultural emphasis and seizes the opportunity to exploit it but remains complicit in the overall emphasis which celebrates change. Zoë challenges this, suggesting it does not reflect her personal experience, as well as returning more carefully to biology (social constructions around female voice characteristics). She tells us she feels subordinated on the telephone in more 'official' scenarios. Although she does not say specifically, the speakers she says she feels subordinated by are almost certainly men. She points out that she is comfortable with women *but* with 'fairly official' people she fears being seen as a 'silly woman'. She is doing her best to challenge the celebratory talk of Warren and Joan, and the interviewer who colludes, but with the weight of opposition to her view, it is necessary to hedge. She acknowledges that her boyfriend also says she should not feel subordinated, unfortunately in some ways bringing the focus for society's ills back round to her own self perceptions. She adds the tag 'do you know what I mean?' which would have been a nice opportunity for someone to offer support.

The interviewer takes a more confrontational tack and probes to try to get at the 'real' root of 'her' problem. Unfortunately, Zoë passes on the opportunity to confront her subordination head on and shifts the spotlight to the perhaps less threatening (though important) axis of age (early twenties), probably due in part to speaking in front of Joan who is a 'mature' student in her forties, more assertive, and happier with gender relations. Zoë also presents herself as 'unusual', as an oddment in a society where everyone questions the validity of her experience, whether it be her boyfriend, (men) on the phone, the interviewer, or the other interviewees. While those around her play the cultural 'post-feminist' game, she is marginalized and finds it difficult to find a voice. Her conclusion, or at least disclaimer, is that she will be treated differently, or she will learn how to manage 'her' problem, as she matures.

Joan had previously utilised the 'equality as achieved/imminent' repertoire. A few seconds later, however, her talk suggests that women do in fact continue to receive unequal treatment. However, rather than be seen as a passive victim, her talk portrays her as a strong, resourceful and agentic individual. As with Coward's (1993) and Griffin's (1989) interviewees, she is able to see structural oppression of women generally but she claims to resourcefully work the system to her own personal

advantage: 'you have to adopt an attitude that works within the framework that's there' by sending men on errands to get a fair auction price. Again, it is interesting how age intersects with gender in Joan's talk. She suggests that experience and wisdom come with age, unfortunately adding weight to Zoë's 'misplaced' ideas about the source of 'her' problems: 'I think the older that you get the more aware you become...'. Through this accounting strategy she 'warrants voice' (Gergen, 1989) and lends authority (see also Potter and Wetherell, 1987) to her view that conformity is the way forward. Therefore, although Joan may be empowering Zoë by encouraging her to be more assertive, her talk also reduces the potential for Zoë to continue to express her disempowerment since she is in her early twenties, and by implication, does not have the benefit of Joan's experience.

Following the interviewer's failure to recognise the 'advantages' Joan suggested, and her subsequent recapitulation, Zoë's talk, now orientated towards the 'post-feminist' tone of everyone else, also continues the theme of female advantage. She too reworks existing power relations, presenting women as empowered and men as disempowered through women's manipulative capacities. The talk is of the benefits of femininity when she wishes to order a curry or taxi compared to the much poorer treatment of men. The men who take her orders for a curry or taxi would be using a 'male as protector' discourse, making sure the female is well looked after. But Zoë is claiming to take advantage of this in a quite deliberate fashion, making her complicit, through her talk if not in practice. She tells us how she raises her pitch to sound like a female in distress and in need of male attention. She also presents herself as in control and exercising power over men towards the end of the interview when talking about her relationship with her partner:

> **Zoë:** ...As soon as he gets wound up that's it, you know, 'cus I mean women are extremely manipulative creatures that are so very, very good at it, that you can manipulate the 'thick fair'. Sorry to say it but that's how it feels. Men just don't seem to realise.
>
> [Extract 5, Group 1]

and a few seconds later:

Zoë: It just seems that men just, I think men sort, in my opinion, it's horrible for me to say it but I actually feel that men sort of think on one level. Women manipulate them and they just don't know. Some of the things that you can do. I've been reading one of those self-help books about women and men that somebody lent me and women can just get round men so easily. They don't realise. Just a different wording or something. You could be really, really good at it. You know if I wanted my boyfriend to go and just jump off a cliff or, it's just that he'll do it and no way would I do it if I didn't really want to.

[Extract 6, Group 1]

Not only are women presented as manipulative, but men, usually characterised as rational and intelligent (Seidler, 1989, 1994), are portrayed as 'thick' and only capable of thought 'on one level', a rather reactionary and equally generalising deconstruction of masculinity. In order to reduce the hearability of prejudicial talk, Zoë offers the apologetic disclaimers 'sorry to say it but...' (Extract 5) and in Extract 6, 'it's horrible for me to say it but...' (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975; Billig, 1988; Gough, 1998; Bonilla-sylva and Forman, 2000), before continuing to make prejudiced remarks. According to Zoë, when men are manipulated by women they are so shallow and incapable of deeper thought they 'don't realise', 'they just don't know'.

Furthermore, women are said to be keeping themselves up to date with techniques for maintaining their (purported) power over men through self-help books ('Women are from Venus: Men are from Mars', Gray, 1993, is a book often quoted in the data collected for the third study - (Chapter 6). This, of course, is a traditional tactic that continues to circulate in a 'post-feminist' culture, giving a superficial impression of power (behind the throne) whilst remaining loyal to, and reproducing, underlying inequalities. It also, in contrast to the earlier example of 'equality as sameness', constructs a version of 'equality as difference': women would be relatively powerless but seek recompense through manipulation of men, whilst men would be relatively powerful but they are deluded as their power is unknowingly undermined by women. Unlike postmodern feminist visions of 'equal but different', in this view the value system remains intact and would require ongoing manipulation rather than an open and respectful revaluation of difference.

It is possible to speculate that Zoë's talk is, at least in part, an attempt to deal with the contradictory discourses between lecture and seminar material in the week prior to the discussion which concentrated on men's oppression of women, and the general celebratory tone of the other group members whom she saw as more assertive and powerful (probably desirably so) than herself. Zoë had described herself variously throughout the interview, though most often as relatively vulnerable and traditionally feminine. As the end of the interview approached, she may well have sought to counterbalance this and 'set the record straight'. Although acknowledging the constraints of her femininity and relative lack of power, perhaps especially coming from a working class background, she would not want to be seen as 'whinging' and 'moaning' in front of Joan (and probably the men) who carries herself in a more assertive (and possibly therefore read 'masculine', 'middle class', and 'powerful') and individualist manner:

> **Zoë:** ...I also *think*, not to offend you [*Joan*] or anything, that you see it [editor: differences between people] as people being on ability because you come across a bit more of an assertive person than what I am myself, I feel quite constrained by, like, because of the fact I'm female and I think, a lot of people see that as unusual seen as I'm over twenty and they think you've been born in a modern era sort of thing.
>
> [Extract 7, Group 1]

Zoë challenges Joan's focus on individual differences and her disregard for gender as a structuring force. Unfortunately, however, by blaming herself for being subordinated, 'her' language (which of course is not originally authored by her alone) plays its own part in maintaining the myth that subsequently returns to oppress her. Zoë is caught in a double bind. If she remains silent she cannot change anything and no-one will hear her plight, leaving her subordinated and left behind in a world of supposed equality. If she speaks out she risks being subordinated and silenced by those who are, or present themselves as, more powerful, as well as the 'post-feminist' discourses she sees as being in general cultural circulation regarding her 'new' generation. Manipulation, or talk of it, provides a form of consonance between the equally problematic options of silent suffering or further disempowerment through open admission. It allows her to air her experiences of oppression whilst showing that, like the others, she has agency and can

do something about it. The repertoire (dis)empowers her as an individual and is simultaneously (un)helpful to other women (and men) by being an ultimately non-threatening, conservative gesture.

Zoë and Joan's talk also provides us with an example of within-group heterogeneity. It is clear that whilst access to higher education may offer women more access to power, it would be quite wrong to neglect the multiplicity of backgrounds/discourses women, especially in the current climate of promoting increased access for all, bring with them. Attending university, despite popular misconceptions, does not necessarily make individuals 'assertive', 'middle class', or equally powerful. This example clearly demonstrates the difficulties of dwelling simplistically and primarily on homogeneous social structures such as 'class' (Pakulski and Waters, 1996), 'gender' (Hollway, 1994; Connell, 1995), and social categories generally (Sacks, 1972; Schegloff, 1991). Whilst analytical categories of difference have their uses as first approximations and qualified generalisations, they are often used carelessly and, as conversation analysts remind us, they are often unsubstantiated by the data.

However, a balance can be struck between this and paying attention to wider social and political structures. Where commonalties and differences within and between socially and/or academically recognised groups are found, they may be interesting and some careful speculation beyond the data may be necessary. Noticeably, here, the men did not utilise the 'women as manipulators' repertoire. Given that accusations of manipulation are usually overt, the men may be at greater risk of being labelled sexist than the women who would generally be seen as 'speaking authentically from direct personal experience'. However, data collected in a previous study from three similar focus groups but involving only men and sampled from the same population did not yield any examples either. The common denominators, therefore, are probably the presence of a critical/feminist researcher and the wider social, and contextual (university lectures and seminars, educated status, etc.), pressures not to be perceived as overtly sexist (Billig, 1988; Gough, 1998). Also, even though this repertoire could serve similar purposes as the other repertoires, it would be paradoxical as well as disempowering for the men to argue that they are being 'unwittingly' manipulated.

5.4 Summary and Conclusions

The participants drew upon multiple repertoires that present gender and current power relations in fragmented and often contradictory ways. The 'equality as imminent/ achieved' repertoire presents gender inequality as a thing of the past or thereabouts. Yet inequality is maintained by premature celebration of freedom to pick and choose between genders, and by contradictorily continuing to promote traditional forms of gender and policing of alternatives. The need for personal involvement is also absented by a focus on the 'out-thereness' of a society changing under its own momentum, for example, through increased independent living or technological advances. The 'women as oppressors/men as victims' repertoire undermines calls for change which have no place in a society where 'women have gone too far' (see Ford, 1985 in relation to men) and disempower men, *even* in such traditionally male-dominated arenas as the factory. The 'women as manipulators' repertoire also serves ultimately to support male privilege. The women prescribe working within the system in the housing market, or playing the 'damsel in distress' when ordering take-aways or taxis. This constructs women as agentic individuals with concealed powers that can be exercised through strategic planning and manipulation of men, whilst doing nothing to challenge oppressive practices and masculinities.

These repertoires, though distinct in terms of content and function, may be seen on a higher level of analysis as working together ideologically to form a picture of *overall* equality between the sexes. This storytelling about a mythical balancing of power may be explicit as in the 'equality as imminent/achieved' repertoire, or it may be more subtle, such as the use of choice exemplars of 'women as oppressors/men as victims' that counterbalance men's oppression, or by suggesting 'women as manipulators' have a behind-the-scenes power that parallels men's more overt power. On some readings this talk of women's power is encouraging. It shows that power is an issue to the students and that they understand many of the issues they were learning about. With respect to the women, it shows that being viewed as subordinate and disempowered, perhaps especially in the company of the opposite sex or other more powerful individuals of the same sex, and as a *relatively* powerful group of women (potentially if not already middle class, mostly young or older but independent and assertive, etc.), is not

acceptable to them - an excitement, however, unlikely to be shared by women of lower status.

What is less encouraging, however, is how the various repertoires prematurely signal a balanced account between men and women. A denial and collusion similar to that highlighted by Coward (1993), Griffin (1989) and Whelehan (2000) is read in the interviewee's celebration of a shift away from the 'bad old days', which masks the need for change and permits current inequalities to continue through discourses that reinforce traditional masculinities and male power. The women may regard gender relations as traditionally highly oppressive, and now some (albeit limited) changes are underway, they present themselves as 'thankful'. Perhaps there is concern that to press for more change would appear 'ungrateful', like they are 'whinging', 'whining' and 'moaning' (Spender, 1980), or they are sensitive to the current backlash amongst men, making them careful not to be too demanding too soon. So they foreshadow equality, prematurely and improvidently celebrate present changes, and suggest equalisations or even reversals of power, all of which effectively veil, and displace attention away from, continuing inequalities.

The men, as a social group that generally *does* stand to gain from current power relations (and again well-educated, white, etc.), encourage, and are encouraged by, such a view. In a culture of self-contained individualism where the speaker is seen as an originary author, and direct experience of the world is held in great esteem, it will often be assumed that women are providing an authentic appraisal of their situation. The 'women's views' absolve the men, as well as other women, from personal responsibility and justify indifference, inaction, and perpetuate a myth of equality. Unfortunately, the authentic voice of the Other that the men hear and find so compelling may well be their own. They welcome the 'women's talk' which confirms a personal and cultural (and academic e.g. Farrell, 1993) denial of men's power and women's relative lack. Similarly, the voice the women hear, perhaps especially as relatively powerful women, may well be a denial of their position of disempowerment and men's relative power. In this view, current inequalities are balanced out and reinvented in the interests of bolstering an illusion that, for different reasons, both sexes may find reassuring in a 'post-feminist' culture.

Some important and overlapping epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and political implications for feminist research into the social construction of gender follow from this study. It provides an illustrative example of how this kind of work can appear to verge on 'blaming the victims' and could explain the paucity of similar work on women. However, when viewed through the subtlety of a poststructuralist lens it should become clear that the buck does not rest solely with the women (or men) studied. It is worth rehearsing the point that the men and women are 'spoken' by the circulating repertoires that they 'speak'. The women play a part in maintaining personal and general female oppression (as agents) but so do all the individuals (male or female) who partly determine women's future by providing them with the linguistic tools of their un/doing. Both oppression, and sites for change, are diffuse in this view. The proverbial buck rests *everywhere* as the focus is shifted primarily towards 'conservative' and 'progressive' language whilst retaining embodiment and related ensembles of gendered discourses as critical levers.

It has been argued in this chapter that essentialism gets in the way of change by selectively focusing our attention a priori on particular groups, i.e. through sex-specific participant selection, such as studying only 'men and masculinity/inequality'. An example was offered of a nuanced approach that recognises the inevitability, and necessity, of having some a priori stances, such as that against men's wide-scale aggregate oppression of women as critical reference points and levers for change, whilst remaining open within the bounded discursive framework they provide to finer grain complexity. It is possible, therefore, to maintain that generally men exercise greater power than women whilst also recognising that individuals, albeit to varying degrees, be they male or female, researcher or researched, feminist or non-feminist, etc. oscillate between challenging and bolstering the status quo. Such an approach does not, of course, preclude finding differences between men and women, or along other social axes, as demonstrated by the 'women as manipulators' repertoire and the intersections of gender, class and age discussed here. However, these will be analytical findings rather than pre-emptive points of departure. It is the overarching aim of the present chapter, in combination with section 3.5.1, to suggest that a space needs to be created for a more inclusive feminism which welcomes any[body's] challenge to any[body's] maintenance of gender inequalities. The next chapter follows a similar study. Again, the participants

were psychology undergraduates. However, in this case, women were also involved in the focus groups.

6 The Discursive Maintenance of Gender Inequality by Women and Men on Internet Discussion Boards

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 concentrated on how a dominant group of men maintained their power over women through their discursive labour. The male university students presented themselves as victims, justifying, legitimising, naturalising and normalising their position of dominance. In Chapter 5, it was argued that both male and female university students were maintaining gender inequality through repertoires of 'equality as imminent/achieved', 'women as oppressors / men as victims', and 'women as manipulators'. It was concluded that a greater emphasis could be placed on progressive or conservative language use rather than the bodies of authors whilst retaining a feminist focus on how inequality is reproduced. This final study continues this theme of treating language as primary, with embodiment and identity difference playing an even more diminished role in the analysis. [1]'Men's' and 'women's language' is analysed for similarity so as to reproduce the gender binary as little as possible (although the marks of gender are retained through names - 2.11). In addition to these methodological interests, through studying an internet discussion board, this study also contributes a relatively unexplored context to the current body of feminist discourse analytic knowledge on the social construction of gender (2.11).

Discussion boards are places where individuals meet virtually through writing about issues which affect them, asking questions, offering answers and solutions to problems, etc. As such, and like the internet more generally (Spender, 1995), they are language-saturated and are therefore a rich resource for the discourse analyst. As a place where contributors write rather than talk, they also provide a supplement to the privileging of (initially) spoken text in the previous two studies. In addition, the participants in the previous two studies were sampled from a student population. It was felt that the discussion board would attract a greater diversity of participants. Although identities

[1] Some children contributed to the discussions but (judging by content) this was rare

are difficult to pin down and the second study argued for work which placed greater emphasis on discourses rather than where those discourses 'come from', an arena was sought that would nevertheless be more inclusive and where similarity in the use of discourses could be studied rather than limiting the search to difference and discontinuity. The particular discussion board chosen is aimed at women (though men are not excluded), who mainly write about personal relationships with men.

Two broad currents of thinking exist around the internet with respect to feminism and critical theory: the 'liberatory approach' and the 'critical approach', or as Ebo (1998) labels them, 'cybertopia' vs. 'cyberghetto'. These are discussed in turn. As with most dichotomies, the two approaches set up a rather simplistic dilemma (Billig, *et al.*, 1988) between this and that, where a more sophisticated view would probably be more appropriate. Nevertheless, they are interesting and represent very influential discourses in the field. In 1981 only 213 computers made up the internet, which originally began as a military exercise in the 1960s. By 1995, an estimated 20 million computers were connected (Fallon, 1997). Such dramatic increases in access and women's presence in computer technology and on the net have fuelled excitement in some quarters about the internet's liberatory potential. Women have been involved in computers since their inception. Senjen and Guthrey (1996) remind us, for example, that Ada, Countess of Lovelace and Charles Babbage worked together in designing the first computer software program in the early nineteenth century, even though they could not manufacture their design. To take one further example, Grace Hopper designed the computer programming software COBOL which was the first to use plain English rather than abstract mathematical symbols.

Haraway (1991) and other 'cyberfeminists' (cyberfeminism is represented by many forms of feminist politics but concerns itself particularly with information technology - Hawthorne and Klein, 1999), for example, Lawley (1993), find it useful to take the idea of the internet as a network and tie this in with what is often regarded as quintessential women's work - weaving. Haraway argues that relationships and interconnectedness can be emphasised and that women's issues can be promoted in this new arena where meaning is being hotly contested. Familiar binaries, she argues, such as human and machine, fact and fiction, and masculinity and femininity, are becoming more obviously blurred and leaky.

The liberatory view regards much of the widespread talk of harassment of women online as overstated by the media and as propaganda which serves to exclude women further (Sherman, 1995). There is also a hope that the focus on language and anonymity could aid those on the margins of society such as the disabled, disfigured, and homosexuals and could provide quality distance education and voting opportunities for excluded groups (Ebo, 1998). Men and women can participate in internet sex in a new discursive arena which can be free of the baggage of duty, physical domination and the institution of the family. Women are 'agents' and fully empowered, as men and women seek mutual fulfilment and pleasure rather than power relationships (Blair, 1998). And 'no' really does mean 'no' - a modem can be turned off.

Some women and men have proactively contributed to making the internet woman-friendly and to promoting women's issues. Sometimes they have tried to subvert man-made meanings and exclude oppressive men. For example, it has become more common for women to call their websites by names such as 'Cybergrrl' and 'Geekgirl', e.g:

http://www.cybergrrl.com/
http://www.geekgirl.com.au/geekgirl/index.html

in response to the oppressive male-centred material (e.g. porn and sex chat) that would normally form a large proportion of results on a typical search using keywords such as 'girl' or 'woman'. Unfortunately, many of these sites have a postfeminist flavour (2.12), celebrating women's power and failing to properly acknowledge continued male oppression (Wakeford, 1997).

However, there are also some overtly feminist and politically active sites, for example:

http://www.europrofem.org/02.info/22contri/contribu.htm#en
http://www.feminist.com/
http://www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/WomensStudies/others.htm
http://www.feminist.org/
http://www.igc.org/igc/gateway/wnindex.html

http://www.now.org

A global directory of women's net presence is available at the Virtual Sisters Website:

http://www.igc.apc.org/.

Senjen and Guthrey (1996) and Fallon (1997) also provide detailed lists of a large number of women's and feminist sites. There is also a relatively small number of profeminist 'men's' sites too, for example, NOMAS (National Organization for Men Against Sexism):

http://www.nomas.org/

The absence of the physical body and uncertainty about identity on the internet are also often seen as liberatory. To a large degree people can be whoever they want to be and whoever they say they are. Such possibilities dissolve structural difference, including gender, national and cultural divides (Wakeford, 1997).

However, not all feminists and critical thinkers are so optimistic about the new communication technologies and there is a growing body of critical study. Whilst there is some acceptance amongst critical thinkers that the internet could provide opportunities for equality, this optimism is matched by some serious concerns (Scott, Semmens and Willoughby, 2001). Much of the concern is about unequal access and carry-over of sexist, racist, classist, homophobic and other undesirable practices into the new technologies (Ebo, 1998). Much of the optimism of those who see the internet as liberatory is based on a projected future where access is widespread and equal.

Unfortunately, at present, the internet is clearly not equally available to all individuals, leading to what some commentators call 'information apartheid' (Ebo, 1998). *The Guardian* newspaper in England has run a series of articles which highlight difference between groups, for example, between the richest and poorest countries of the world (Jan 24 2001), with only 2% of the world's population having access (Dec 14 2000). In the UK, only 1/3 of homes have access (17 Jan 2001), there is a class divide in the workplace (14 Dec 2000 and 17 Jan 2001), a gender divide in terms of who has

used the internet of 57% males to 45% of women, younger people are far more likely to go online than older people (March 28 2001), and ethnic minorities such as Hispanics and blacks have far less access (Dec 14 2000).

There are also moves within the academy to create an elite private internet called I2 (Internet 2) or NGI (Next Generation Internet) as some academics nostalgically seek to return to a time (that never was) where bandwith was reserved solely for their use rather than for entertainment and commerce (Jones, 1999). Access, of course, does not have to be at a home computer, but library and other public access is sketchy and there are vast differences in access at work. Montgomery (1999) examines the differences in universities, for example, where those with different occupations and status (e.g. cleaners, secretaries, lecturers and professors) have differential access and are exposed to different levels of surveillance despite working for the same employer. On a very general scale, then, those with access are relatively privileged groups.

However, whilst such structural factors are very important, general trends cannot necessarily be mapped onto local trends on particular sites. Many contributors to the discussion board studied here identified themselves in their contributions. An encouragingly wide range of groups were represented. Contributions were made by men and women, Asians, Americans, British, homosexuals, heterosexuals, transvestites, 16 to 40 something year olds, working and middle classes, single parents, un/married parents, single persons and those in relationships, business men and women, women who had been abused and those who felt in power and control, those who had internet access themselves and those who used work or friend's computers, Christians, atheists, Muslims, all manner of political persuasions, and so on.

This is very encouraging but no claims are made that the sample is in any way representative of the population at large. It is quite possible, for example, that those who deviate from 'norms' and 'expectations' such as homosexuals would be more likely to declare their 'differences' whilst possibly only forming a small and non-representative proportion of overall contributions. However many groups are represented by individuals, the internet obviously divides between the have's and have nots. This may not generally be a formally recognised theoretical axis but whilst access may cut across other social axes such as gender and class, it could be argued that access to the internet

should be regarded as an axis in its own right (Ebo, 1998). There are also recognised social groups that are less likely to have easy access and were probably not represented (they did not self-disclose anyway) such as immigrants, the computer illiterate, and the elderly.

In relation to computer technology more generally, Morse (1997) describes the 'unwill' of women who come to new technologies with discourses that disadvantage them through stereotypical notions around their unsuitability and incompatibility. This unwill is reinforced by structural exclusion of women from computer and software technology. Decisions on the direction of technology are taken mostly by white, middle class, corporate and mainly western men (Cockburn, 1992). Despite claims that such new technologies offer a de-gendered world, work practices have been carried over from traditional industries and women are more likely to find themselves on production lines, word processing or entering data than in positions of power and influence (Diamond, 1997).

Computing is rapidly becoming yet another masculinised space (Grint and Gill, 1995) and many women view the web as 'male territory' (Wiley, 1995). Designs such as erect six to eight inch joysticks, computer games that present men as muscular heroes and women as 'bimbos', and pornographic representation of women (Coyle, 1996), e-mail harassment (Brail, 1996), and sleazy male chat on discussion forums (Kendall, 1996) further cement men's colonisation of computers and the net. Whilst the web suggests weaving and other stereotypically feminine metaphors, it is mostly defined by the masculine interests of 'surfing', 'cruising' and 'superhighways' (fast cars) (Machan, 1999). Some websites are postfeminist and some show an unbridled hatred of feminism and feminists, e.g.

http://www.debunker.com/patriarchy.html

Most empirical research that is concerned with language and gender on the internet and in computing generally has been conducted from within the linguistic traditions discussed in section 3.2., particularly 'sex difference' research. For example, women online are assumed by men to be too talkative even when the writers were actually men presenting as women with female nicknames (Herring, Johnson, and Dibendetto, 1992,

cited in Rodino, 1997). Women are also viewed as in need of help and technical assistance more than men (Bruckman, 1993) and as more co-operative (Matheson, 1991). Statistical analyses show men and women to choose different topics for discussion on some Usenet discussion boards (Crowston and Kammerer, 1998). According to Spender (1995), women posting messages on the net are subject to the sort of abuses she identifies in her 1980 work, *Man Made Language*. Women are frequently silenced and challenged by men who force what they consider to be their more 'rational' views. Men take the floor more frequently and for longer, direct conversation, and send requests for sexual favours (see also Kramarae and Taylor, 1993; Petersen, 1994), even threatening women with rape and having their throats cut. Women, according to Spender, are being excluded by men's 'sexual terrorism' and 'data rape' on the net which is aimed at creating a male-dominated space, and protected when challenged by appeals to freedom of speech.

It is possible that some of men's advances and abuses are due to the impersonal character of online communication. With no face-to-face contact and an absence of non-verbal cues, both men and women could feel 'safer'. Kendall (2000) notes these feelings of greater safety on a discussion board. For example, homosexual and bisexual men were welcomed by the heterosexual majority. Unlike situations involving face-to-face contact, online there is no 'threat' or possibility of misconstruing gestures or utterances as sexual advances. Chinese-American men also said they felt safer on the superhighway than on the American streets and welcomed the liberatory aspects of online communication. Clearly, in this relatively new domain meaning is up for grabs, both for those with and those without research interests, as to whether the internet is a place of liberation or continued inequality or both/neither.

It is worth pointing out, however, that the postings by men on the board studied here yielded very few examples of men 'flaming' as it is called in net-speak (abusive, slanderous, or otherwise offensive language). Most men were well-behaved and some showed a great deal of empathy, caring, and concern for women's issues. The women mostly welcomed men's presence and similarly were usually polite to male contributors. The site is monitored by administrators and it is possible that offensive material could have been removed. Administrators were, however, very tolerant (some female to female conversations were very abusive and more in tune with Spender's (1995)

between-sex findings). 'Gender wars' easily flare up on the net (Spender, 1995) and it is possible that the administrators were less tolerant of exchanges between the sexes than those between women, especially as the site is aimed at women. Of course, this is speculation but what can be said with empirical confidence is that men's postings were generally very short and had little concern with 'correcting' women or belittling them, and no threats or sexual advances were present on the board. Whilst this research is not concerned with a formal or statistical assessment of these issues, it was apparent that questions about access (discussed above) and the more obvious forms of sexism remain unanswered.

Researching gender on the internet from a social constructionist perspective is a relatively new but growing focus for feminism. There is some work, for example, on robots and other uses of computer technologies and cyberspace (e.g. Wolmark, 1999). However, this has tended generally to be concerned with embodiment, for example, the way new information technologies and machines have breached bodily boundaries, and shown the dichotomies between human and machine, culture and nature, subject and environment, public and private, etc. to be leaky and mutual (Hawthorne and Klein, 1999). For example, Springer (1999) discusses popular films such as 'The Terminator' and 'Robocop' and how bodies and technology are increasingly represented as conjoined and how such hypermasculinities suggest a crisis in masculinity. Although some research has been conducted on gender and the internet and computing more generally, little work has been carried out within a discourse analytic and social constructionist framework on discussion boards. The present study aims to make a contribution towards addressing this paucity.

6.2 Context

One of the benefits to studying discussion boards is that there is no interaction between researcher and researched. As Potter and Wetherell (1987: 162) note, '[t]raditionally, one of the most important advantages of collecting naturalistic records and documents is the almost complete absence of researcher influence on the data.' It is a long-standing concern in the social sciences that researchers can unknowingly influence the course of a study. In positivist work, the concern manifests itself as 'bias', but it crops up in

qualitative work too. For example, whilst 'bias' is accepted as unavoidable in its purest sense in discourse analytic work, there is often concern about how participants orient themselves to researcher's questions and stances (3.4). Importantly, power issues have to be woven into this equation too. In the kind of data collection utilised here, the researcher has no control over the topics discussed unless s/he contributes (discussed in a moment), and no control over how participants are selected in the first instance or when they can come and go. Contributors to the board can write more freely and with less censorship, often in the relative comfort of their own homes. They can also edit their text until they feel comfortable with it, something not so easily done in interviews, for example.

The discussion boards also provide a relatively anonymous and depersonalised area where emotive and difficult issues can be discussed more freely. Women often welcome this anonymity which they find a liberating experience, although many men feel the need to know which sex is communicating with them so they may respond 'appropriately' and they look forward to mass video conferencing where biological markers of sex will return to the fore (Diamond, 1997). Participants, particularly women, are therefore relatively empowered compared to interviews. This ethical relativity may offset to some extent concerns about disempowerment through not gaining informed consent.

Those who view internet discussions without contributing, as the researcher did here, are known as 'lurkers'. For the 'male feminist' researcher this brings with it ethical and reflexive concerns. Stated most strongly he is a voyeur, even a rapist penetrating a women's space without invitation (see Smith's, 1987, argument in relation to men's penetration of feminism). Although a more rounded position is probably more appropriate given the feminist intentions of the study (3.5.1), some knotty ethical issues remain. The general culture on the internet is one of openness. It is widely known that unless passwords are required, one can assume almost anything one says or does on the net is public domain and overtly so (Senjen and Guthrey, 1996), and the discussion board rules clearly state '[b]e sure you want to give information which is personal before you post a message. Remember that anybody can read it.' Administrators for the particular board in question publish guidelines for its use (Appendix 5) which state that

it must not be used for commercial purposes, though they do not prohibit non-commercial academic research.

Still, although there are no formal or legal restraints, it will not necessarily have crossed someone's mind that they could be unwittingly contributing to a research project when they write about what are sometimes very personal issues. It was eventually decided, however, that asking for informed consent in this situation could potentially put individuals off using a space that provides a resource, meeting place and supportive network (Sharf, 1999), and the very need for women's spaces and dearth of men-only spaces suggests the internet is a male-dominated arena (Camp, 1996; Hall, 1996) in need of such places of refuge. Researcher presence on one board would no doubt raise suspicions about others too.

It was therefore decided that either the study go ahead without informed consent or not at all. In order to decide whether or not to pursue this line of inquiry the researcher asked himself whether it would be ethical *not to* utilise this particular resource (see Sharf, 1999). The internet is a relatively new arena and therefore meaning is still up for grabs. It is vital that feminist work concentrates on such areas, as with the new reproductive technologies (2.3), that have not yet been fully colonised by masculinist values (Haraway, 1991; Harcourt, 1999) (and it is these values rather than men *per se* that are important). It could be argued that ignoring particular contexts because there are problems gaining informed consent and only studying ethically 'safe' options would be ignorant and complicit. Researchers have an opportunity to make a difference even if, as here, the difference is not at an immediate level for the participants involved, using their research skills. Some limited comfort is also taken from the fact that many of the participants were keen to draw upon or request professional knowledge.

It was concluded that the study should go ahead but with precautions in place, in particular, regarding researcher contributions and anonymity. It was felt necessary to avoid contributing to the discussions because not only would this spoil the power relationships and other advantages discussed above, but it would risk imposing vested interests. Of course, *not* contributing posed problems too, for example, when women asked for helpline numbers, the researcher was torn between offering support and rigidly sticking to uninvolved objectives and principles. As it transpired he observed

advice being offered very quickly in serious cases by other women, reminding him of those all-too-masculine problems of 'fathering' and interrupting women (Spender, 1980; 1995) (many concepts take on new meaning on the net including temporal concepts such as 'interrupting' which may mean speaking an hour too soon rather than a second too soon as in ordinary conversation). Sometimes the site administrators stepped in to offer advice, as with the following example, where some women expressed feelings of isolation and felt they had no-one to turn to:

> **Re: I wish I had had a confidential organisation I could have turned to**
> Just to mention, at this point, some of the confidential organisations who help victims of violence in the home: Lifeline (tel 01335 370825), Refuge (0171 395 7700) and Women's Aid Federation of England (WAFE) (helpline 0345 023 468 Mon-Thur 10am-5pm, Fri 10am-3pm and e-mail: wafe@wafe.co.uk)
> ***Rebecca - Community Manager***

Indeed, some women have left abusive partners and have made other positive changes directly as a result of advice they have received from other women on the site. This problem of researcher distancing versus intervention could not be brought to closure with any confidence. Suffice to say, the researcher did not contribute but would have if circumstances had forced the issue and he would have simply discarded that particular thread and remained silent about his research interests.

Although many men contributed and were often invited to by women, the discussion board is clearly aimed primarily at women. One has to click on 'women' to enter and the site, stereotypically, says to the visitor this is an exclusively female domain. Pastel colours - particularly pinks and purples, and fonts and banners that are soft and gentle on the eyes, topics such as love, health and beauty, defying the ageing process, female medical issues, 'hermoney', Interflora, lingerie, etc., all serve to make women feel intuitively welcome and men to feel a sense of guilt about what could be perceived as voyeurism or trespassing. Despite the researcher's abstract theoretical concerns about the inadequacies of identity politics (Chapter 5), or assumptions that men are essentially unsuited to feminism or other 'women's business' (3.5.1), these types of discussion boards provide an important space for many women. They form a support network especially for those confined to domestic duties and prevented from entering the public world and communicating with other women without men's presence.

It has therefore at times been difficult carrying out this research. Not only did the researcher experience discomfort 'as a man' visiting a space that has been cleared for women partly in response to concerns that the internet fast becoming occupied male territory (or more cynically, to gather women together to target commercially), but the collection and analysis of the data was sometimes very emotional for him. For example, even though participant emotions are mostly less visible than in face-to-face interviews, he read horrific and upsetting stories such as women wetting themselves at the thought of their husbands returning home, or how a husband calls his 14 year old dyslexic son a 'prick' and challenges him to real fights. He experienced guilt that his project was relatively abstract and did nothing directly to help those he studied. While the women described the daily realities of lived experience, he spent much of his time in a masculine abstract world of discourse (Shildrick, 1997).

Feminist work does, however, need to be carried out from many directions and angles and it cannot be assumed that practical help is the only valid help because it is so immediate. The contributors regularly drew upon theories that have emerged from the academy over the years and entered general circulation such as biology, socialisation and cultural differences, and which had clearly informed their thinking. The research conducted here will not stop men battering women on such an immediate level but it does contribute to the growing social constructionist feminist theory that will hopefully increasingly inform practice as it filters through to helplines and other support networks and hopefully enters general circulation. It is also necessary to point out that the most distressing stories formed a relatively small part of the data analysed, with most stories being more concerned with men who will not talk rather than men who communicate with their fists. Whether this is encouraging, or a result of women's silent suffering, remains unclear.

This brings us to another difficult problem. It would be problematic to regard the text analysed here as representing 'truth' or 'reality' (2.9). Internet writers may fantasise and adopt identities other than their everyday identities (Danet, 1998) and often 'textually cross-dress' (Lawley, 1993; Turkle, 1995; Senjen and Guthrey, 1996; Roberts and Parks, 2001). Kendall (2000), for example, discusses the linguistic construction of white American heterosexual masculinity by 'Others' such as Asians and homo/bi-

sexuals in order to fit in with discussion board norms. Of course, interviews, etc., do not provide guarantees either, but as a relatively anonymous context, the internet does lend itself to attempts to reconstruct the self in ways that overtly bring to life the social constructionist contention that gender and sexual identity, and reality more generally, are constructed through language and practice (Butler, 1990) (2.11). The internet is in many ways postmodern: a 'hyperreality' of endless surface imagery, frantic clicking that has no obvious point of closure, very different conceptions of time and space, and images that never age and yellow like paper but exist forever in a timeless forum where they can be infinitely retrieved as if they were new, etc. (Baudrillard, 1994).

The need for a focus on language as it constitutes identity rather than using identity politics as a point of departure is made even more salient by the observation that some of the language on some discussion boards is written not by humans at all but by computer programmes (chatter-bots) which respond automatically to text and often fool humans into thinking they are human (Zdenek, 1999). Many such programs construct gender in prescriptive ways. One such 'female' program studied by Zdenek throws out random references to PMS. So, for example, a question such as "You answer so damn fast. How do you do it?" is responded to with "I have PMS today", leaving the other writer linking the two in a factual manner and probably assuming mental agility is a fleeting and temporary hormonally induced effect in women, thus constructing gender, biology, intelligence, mental agility, etc. where none exist, i.e. 'copies without originals' (Baudrillard, 1994).

Baudrillard (1994) convincingly argues that reality and virtual reality cannot be bifurcated. Virtual communities, for example, have effects in the 'real' world just as the real world has effects online (Biocca, 1997; Turkle, 1995). It would be offensive, however, to those who have told 'real' stories such as the stories of abuse discussed above, to see all contributions as copies without originals. In terms of working for change, it is often necessary to strike awkward balances between abstract theory and common cultural understandings. It is therefore necessary, whilst recognising reality and virtual reality are theoretically inseparable, to take account of popular meanings. Many people view the net as a Disneyland of fantasy which contrasts with, and implies, a 'really real world' beyond. As such, oppressive language could be written on the net with a diminished sense of responsibility. Research therefore needs to 'make real' the

performativity of linguistic practice for those who place emphasis on an essential reality as a pragmatic step (Rodino, 1997). Both the real and the virtual are places where gender inequality is actively reproduced. As with the previous studies, then, the text was analysed, through a feminist lens, for what it achieves rather than in terms of truth or falsity (3.3, 3.4). The analysis, of course, is not necessarily congruous with what a discussion board contributor might suggest were her or his 'intentions' or with 'experience', and is, as always, a construction itself which is open to further multiple interpretations without limit.

Discussions (threads) were downloaded off the site in full. These were saved to hard disk on a PC as separate .doc files. All original formatting was preserved except for loss of background graphics and the changes outlined below. Each thread was printed as a separate document (some examples are provided in Appendix 4) and subjected to a critical discourse analysis (3.4). Anonymity has been ensured on a number of levels. Firstly, contributors will probably have used pseudonyms which were changed again by the researcher. The name of the discussion board has not been given and some minor details have been changed where they could have given away the identity of the contributor, without affecting the integrity of meaning. These changes are bracketed. Dates and times of posting have also been deleted. Apart from some minor alterations to word spacing and font style and size, extracts provided here otherwise appear exactly as they did on the discussion board.

6.3 Analysis

Two distinguishable but intimately related repertoires were identified, namely, 'communication difficulties' and 'the spokesperson'. These are discussed with supporting textual examples below.

Communication Difficulties

The 'communication difficulties' repertoire serves to construct 'two sexes' which for various reasons, it is alleged, are incapable of ordinary communication. Various metaphors are drawn upon to service these ends. The extract that follows provides

some examples of the repertoire. A long extract is provided as other repertoires identified in previous research are in evidence too. To make reference easier, analytical comments are inserted at appropriate points. The reader may wish to read the extract straight through to get a feel for context before returning to the analytical inserts. The extract is taken a few responses after an initial posting by a woman who was angry at her male partner's ignorance and lack of contribution to organising the family Christmas meal:

> **Re: Can't believe what he said.....**
> Most men say stupid, insensitive things like that, sometimes. And many women get very worked up about the domestic arrangements for Christmas, especially for older relatives they're trying to impress...
> ***Victoria***

> **Re: Re: Can't believe what he said.....**
> I think women say as many stupid and insensitive things as men do. It's the fact that men and women think and talk differently from each other. You can understand this better if you read 'Women are from Venus: Men are from Mars'
> ***Anne***

Victoria's comment that most men say 'stupid, insensitive things' is counterbalanced by Anne who says women are equally incapable of empathy. Initially the comment sounds as though it is a challenge to Victoria's simplistic focus on men. However, this is not a 'men and women are the same' type argument. The point Anne is making is that men and women are cognitively different, resulting in different types of communication. 'Women are from Venus: Men are from Mars' is a book (written by John Gray, 1993) that is quoted repeatedly on the discussion board. The book, taking popular stereotypes as a foundation, discusses the differences between men and women that prevent proper dialogue. The metaphor of men and women coming from, or living on, different planets is used to describe a purported communication problem between the sexes which is taken to be essential and universal rather than socially constructed. It also forms part of the wider exploitation of gender difference. Women are doubly exploited by having their oppression sold back to them (Rodino, 1997).

Re: Re: Re: I totally agree with you Anne

Men are defo from a planet different than that of women. I didnt get a chrimbo card from my old man, yet I was upset and he didnt think anything of it. But then, I also think you get romantic men and unromantic women - women are after sex and men not. Why is that then? I know that its rare, but why does everyone say - "Men want only one thing" and "women cant have sex if they arent loved first, or whatever...!

Linda

Linda agrees that '[m]en are [definitely] from a different planet than that of women' and that this is demonstrated, for example, by some men's thoughtlessness at Christmas. Perhaps concerned about being perceived as sexist, Linda counterbalances, saying that there are also examples of women doing stereotypically masculine things and men doing stereotypically feminine things. Having made this point, and now writing as an informed, knowledgeable, rounded and 'non-sexist' writer, however, she reinstates the previous view by expressing surprise that not all men and women conform to stereotypical characterisations. She makes a half-hearted challenge to such stereotypes by asking why people reproduce them whilst reproducing them herself by pointing to the exceptional ('rare') character of behaviours that do not conform to stereotypes.

Re: Re: Re: Re: I totally agree with you Anne

I wouldn't want a christmas card from someone I lived with - and even if I did you can't seem to get cards with "To my Partner", I don't happen to think living together without being married is a sin. Anyway, I prefer sex when it hasn't got "strings"!

Olivia

For Olivia, 11 Jan @ 4.54pm

Why wouldn't you want a Christmas card from someone you lived with? Are you insane or something? I can't understand why a woman would say that, you must be a bloke. For god's sake, cards are written with words, expressing how you feel about someone and that you love them and things like that that you treasure and go unsaid. How old are you - 14? And you prefer sex without strings - you need to grow up for sure. You wanna find yourself a man and then realise what love and sex is all about. You stupid cow.

Linda

Linda criticises Olivia's disinterest in receiving Christmas cards from people she lives with. She is so convinced that this inability to communicate is typically *male* behaviour

that she lashes out, casting Olivia as a male impostor. This serves to police the board and gender more generally by prescribing behaviour fitting of a 'proper female'. Unhappy at the undermining of stereotypes (even though she previously challenged their validity too) she subordinates Olivia by placing her in groups that are generally disempowered in society. She is positioned as insane, unfeeling, child-like, and animal-like. As an aside, she also assumes Olivia is heterosexual which is a common assumption on the board. This turns out to be correct but the previous posting did not state this. However, Linda could have read previous postings on other threads by Olivia that state her sexuality. Pointing out the pervasiveness of taken-for-granteds, Linda, like the researcher, may have also made assumptions about the biological sex of the contributor according to common usage of particular names which may in any case be pseudonyms (discussed in the introduction). As it transpires, Olivia self-identifies as a women:

> **Re: For Olivia, 11 Jan @ 4.54pm**
> I would have a card when we were going out but not when we'd been LIVING TOGETHER for a while (unless he could find a funny one or something) As I said you can't get them with partner, and "to my boyfriend" seems a little childish after years together. I am not 14, I am a woman in my early 20's. Also, men have one night stands, why can't women?
> ***Olivia***

> **Re: Re: Re: Can't believe what he said.....**
> You are stereotyping men and women yourself. It is NOT a "fact" that men and women naturally think differently from each other. It can vary country to country for instance. Anyway everyone is an individual. Still, it was a stupid thing to say. I'd be bloody annoyed if I'd made something nobody wanted. Not that I would cook anyway
> ***Olivia***

In her second posting, Olivia takes us on a whistle-stop tour of different theories of gender. She challenges stereotyping and then attacks natural, biological differences in cognition. The latter, she argues, may be disproved by cross-cultural or cross-nationality comparison. This is followed by an assertion of individual differences which challenges the other theories, especially the stereotyping of men and women as having different cognitive abilities according to group membership.

Re: Re: Re: Re: Can't believe what he said.....

I think you will find that men and women ARE naturally different in many ways. Most of us are screwed up about things because we were brought up by people in the sixties and seventies who were led to believe that it was nurture rather than nature (back to sociology again!) that determined how we were going to turn out. While this is true to some extent...basically it's CRAP!!! Out with action man and barbie and in with non stereotype toys. No wonder people lost their sexual identities, before they even developed. Not that I particularly like these toys anyway, even though I have a housefull of them! Do you know many people from different countries or cultures? Men as well as women and couples in particular? If you do -as I do - you would find that although their lives, views and expectations are different from OURS, men and women are very different from each other within their own cultures. [Someone I know] (czech) has a saying about husbands and wives.....MEN ARE THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD - WOMEN ARE THE NECK! How similar is that to what we in the UK have known (or believed) for centuries. If men and women all thought the same way, what was the point of having two sexes in the first place? Mostly men and women are different, although - like some of us on here - we can agree on things sometimes. VIVRE LA DIFFERENCE I say! However much it pisses us off sometimes. By the way....my husband says that too. It's a MAN THING!

Danielle

[Extract 11]

Danielle also frantically attempts to theorise the sexes. Her writing, as with most writing, is highly contradictory. First she states 'men and women ARE naturally different', drawing on the unchanging inevitabilities of biology (see Gough, 1998). This is overlaid by a historical account of how in the 1960s and 70s biology was overwritten by overzealous parents who believed the way a child grew up depended on how it was nurtured rather than biological predispositions. She blames parents for socialisation practices that led children of the day to be 'screwed up about things' (Gough, 1998). The socialisation theory is seen as both 'true to some extent' and basically 'crap', in other words, some degree of socialisation takes place but over a biological foundation. She criticises the use of non stereotyped toys which, she says, have destroyed sexual identities, yet again entertaining socialisation theory.

In her tour that will eventually ferry us back to the biological foundations of sex difference, she then considers cross-cultural evidence. She states that she knows people

from various cultures, thus warranting voice through positioning herself as knowledgeable and authoritative on the subject. She uses this position to state that cross-cultural comparison shows the same pattern of differences between men and women. Drawing upon her Czechoslovakian friend's saying 'men are the head of the house, women are the neck', she forces home the message that women, *even* in other cultures, are in a supportive role, supporting the decision-making, authoritative man. Having explored and critiqued culture and socialisation, it is now her much more rounded and authoritative view that such within-sex similarity and between-sex difference points to deep-seated biological essences.

Agreement between men and women on these boards is constructed as the exception to the rule that men and women are naturally different: 'we can agree on things sometimes'. In addition to promoting between-sex differences, the language also constructs within-sex similarity through neglecting to mention any parallel lack of agreement and understanding between those of the same sex. Danielle finishes off by saying that although it is annoying at times, differences between the sexes should be celebrated. She lumps all men together, saying that expecting women to take care of organising family at Christmas is a 'man thing', thus normalising and maintaining any difference.

Some of the contributor's language drew upon other forms of 'evidence' to back up claims that the two sexes were incapable of straightforward communication:

> **Why can't men open up?**
> According to the book I am reading at the moment, title 'Why can't men open up', 400 leading psychiatrists were asked why marriages fail, 45% said the primary cause was the husband's inability to communicate his feelings. A Doctor surveyed 1000 people, he found that the change most women want is for men to talk about their feelings, the change men want most is to be understood without having to talk about their feelings. It also says that life to men is one competition after another, and it is normal that they are so attentive when courting us, they are sensitive to us and talk about how they feel cos they know they have to to win the prize - us, once we are obtained, they go back to their normal self, ie. not talking about their feelings. This is all my hubby to a tee, I'm so glad it is normal. (I think!!!)
> ***Alison***

Here, the 'fact' that there are communication differences between men and women is supported by an appeal to the authority of those 'in the know'. Just as men are expected to know men and women are expected to be authorities on all women, professionals are also expected to be reliable conveyors of the true facts regarding both sexes. As might be expected, psychiatrists (psychologists?), as professionals who deal with the mind, relationships, and communication, are seen as well-placed to give us the truth, to tell it like it is. The sheer number of them (400) who expressed a particular view is uncomplicatedly marshalled by Alison as evidence of the truth value of what they are saying, i.e. that men cause marital breakdown through inability to communicate.

These professionals and positivist researchers need to be seen as part of the maintenance of what could either be seen as a cultural myth (as measured from a reference point of 'naturalness') or (if the generalisation is in any way accepted empirically) a 'real-world' phenomenon that continues to thrive partly because professionals unwittingly give it their seal of legitimacy and normality. Doctors are also seen here as authorities on personal relationships. By virtue of their status they are granted permission to speak on diverse areas way beyond their remit (assuming they are medical doctors). Because a thousand authoritative voices speak in unison, it must be true, goes the reasoning. Doctors, like other professionals, of course, are not somehow outside, beyond, or above using discourses in common circulation. Importantly, though, their words warrant voice through category entitlement.

The book that makes these claims is appealed to as an authority which, having explored the rigorous findings of science, authority figures, and real world statistics, and explained away personal experience, may be used as a bona fide information source as Alison spreads the word. The power and influence of such books is exemplified in Alison's final remark that she is now satisfied that her husband's behaviour is normal. The book (or at least Alison's appropriation of it) both justifies and excuses her husband's alleged behaviour and helps promote her tolerance and expectation of it. Such behaviour therefore continues (in *some* men, or more accurately, at *particular* times) but becomes generalised to all men, providing further excuses, normalisation and legitimacy. Kay continues:

Re: Why can't men open up?

Alison I smiled when reading your message. I recently bought a book titled 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus'written by a Dr. John Gray....I could barely put it down ! Despite being written by a man (!?) - is was a superb insight/guide for understanding male-female relationships. Totally facinating. I could relate to so many of the instances he cites, especially with conflicts between men and women, why they happen, how both see eachother through different shades of glasses. We so easily mis-interpret our partners signals as we are both using different signs. Having read the book it made me wonder why we live with men at all, except for sex and having children. I am a heterosexual through and through, but, on paper, it would be better if we lived with women and used men for the aforementioned ! Sex seems to be the one area where men and women speak the same langugage. Men do talk about their feelings, its just we can't hear it. Women can talk and talk to a female friend, but when we talk to a man he feels he must offer solutions. i.e. "I am so tired today, I hate my boss, he gets on my nerves" - male parter replies, "Why don't you look for another job, you are too good for that place" .... instead we would prefer to hear, "Don't let him get to you love, come on, I am taking you out tonight, where would you like to eat". This is just a very small example. Try the book. It could improve your communicaion and understanding. It sure has mine!.

Kay

[Extract 12]

Kay has other authoritative evidence from the regularly quoted book: 'Women are from Venus: Men are from Mars'. The author, although under normal circumstances only permitted to act as 'spokesperson' for his own sex (discussed shortly), is by virtue of his knowledge and status, able to speak (write to be precise) on behalf of both sexes. The repertoire is tacitly reproduced by Kay who conveys surprise that a man should be able to understand women: 'I could barely put it down ! 'Despite being written by a man (!?)', the question mark perhaps signalling that the discourse that only those of a particular sex can understand the behaviours of that sex is colliding with the competing and contradictory discourse that authority figures are in the know, regardless of their biological sex. Kay says she 'could relate to so many of the instances he cites' as a way of bringing personal experience into the discussion as a powerful voice which cannot easily be challenged. She makes it clear she is 'heterosexual through and through' just in case anyone should entertain any ideas that she is homosexual before contemplating

the exclusion of all men from contact other than for sex and reproduction, 'the one area where men and women speak the same language'.

The following extract from a different thread provides another very clear example of 'communication difficulties':

Re: IS THERE AN 'EPIDEMIC' ??!!

Catherine

I think you are being a little too hard on England. I was born and raised in the United States. Believe me, women have just as much trouble getting good affordable childcare there as they do here. Divorce is just as high in the US as here if not more so. The problem with marriage is a lack of communication between men and women. We don't understand each other. We think differently but instead of talking men get the hump and walk out or go to the pub. I've lived here quite awhile and I fail to see a vast difference.

Amelia

[Extract 13]

Amelia also thinks a lack of communication between men and women is at the heart of marriage breakdown across the Atlantic as well as in England. The comment does not remain at the level of pure difference though. The difference is given directional value with the blame lying squarely with men who 'get the hump and walk out or go to the pub'. Not only are all men stereotypically lumped together, doing a disservice to men who are good communicators (and ignoring poor female communicators), but those men who do choose to be incommunicado with women are given the excuse that this is normal, and therefore read acceptable, male behaviour.

Although it is problematic that these accounts construct men and women as fundamentally different in terms of communication, which plays a part in maintaining any difference, there is another more promising side to the same coin. This repertoire must also be seen as experientially descriptive and, quite ironically, communicates the problems facing some men and women. The comments often convey disbelief, anger, frustration, etc., which is unsurprising given the poor treatment some of the women were describing at the hands of men (the repertoire was used mostly by women, although relatively few men participate in the discussions). In order to assess whether

this repertoire is occasioned within the particular context of a women's discussion board, the researcher re-read interview data from Studies 1 and 2 which both yielded many examples across the different groups. For example, consider the following extract taken from Study 2, Group 5 which shows repeated usage:

Matt: Yeah. Would you agree with it then that men are bastards?

Andrea: Yeah.

Lucy: Yeah.

Matt: Is that what you just said?

Andrea: No not really. No, no, not that they're bastards

Matt: 'Cus I assure you I'm not a bastard

Andrea: No, not that they're bastards but there's certain [**Dawn:** *interrupts*]

Dawn: In general they're on a different planet [*simultaneous group talk*] I think they do think differently.

Andrea: I do, definitely, but whether it's because you're born like that or whether it's societal

[...]

Alison: Your right, it's like, your, women and men are tuned into different wavelengths aren't they? It's like [.] [*sighs*] men do tend, the majority of the men I've met tend to be, even if they are sensitive, they're not sensitive, as sensitive as a female

Lucy: Phil's, I'd say he's quite, quite er feminine

Andrea: I think women often want men to be mind-readers though don't they? [...]

[Extract 14]

In response to the strong claim that all men are 'bastards', Dawn settles for the less offensive idea that they are simply 'on a different planet' and 'think differently'. Andrea agrees but cannot take a position with respect to the nature/nurture dilemma. Alison offers an alternative to the planet metaphor, arguing that 'women and men are tuned into different wavelengths'. She ends with stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity as insensitive and sensitive, respectively, which valorises the feminine pole of what would otherwise remain at the level of pure difference. If women are sensitive, they are at least attempting to listen to men's needs, whilst men are plain insensitive and not even trying. Lucy challenges this assumption with the example of her boyfriend, before Andrea uses yet another familiar metaphor for communication difficulties and counterbalances the blaming of men. For Andrea, it is women's fault because they expect men to have psychic mind-reading powers.

The Spokesperson

Another repertoire, 'the spokesperson', was identified. This functions in tandem with the 'communication difficulties' repertoire. Here, someone of a particular sex is either invited by someone of the other sex, or takes it upon themselves, to speak on behalf of others of the same biological sex. It is useful to think of the repertoire as having four sub-divisions. These sub-divisions are: 'the invited spokesman', 'the invited spokeswoman', 'the uninvited spokesman', and 'the uninvited spokeswoman'. In other words, there are two axis upon which the repertoire is built, one, the biological sex concerned, and two, whether or not someone of a particular sex is invited to speak on behalf of their sex.

The Invited Spokesman

Consider the following extract which includes the initial posting followed by the fourth reply:

> **What do blokes really think about one night stands?**
> Any guys out there want to give me your views on this. The guys I meet at clubs seem only interested in one thing. Am I meeting the wrong men or is it now the norm to sleep with someone on the first night?

PS I'm 29.
Cherie

[Other postings ...]

Re: What do blokes really think about one night stands?
What is wrong or right is a matter for you. My view, as a man, is that I would not expect a woman to do anything she thought was not right. Why don't women like you ever meet men like me who simply want a woman to love? A one night stand is the last thing I want.
Steve

[Extract 1]

Men are invited by Cherie to speak on behalf of other men. Men are expected to hold similar views to one another, hence the invitation to discuss what 'blokes really think about one night stands'. Cherie has her own views on what men think, that they are 'only interested in one thing'. Yet she expresses her need to hear the true, authentic account; she wants to know what they *really* think, from the horse's mouth so to speak, and to gain a proper insight into "the mind of a man" ('category entitlement' - Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Steve replies initially by stating that it is a matter for the individual to decide whether one night stands are acceptable. Quite contradictorily he follows this by saying '[m]y view, as a man...' implying that he writes not as an individual, but rather, for men everywhere. Or does he? Perhaps he feels the particular type of promiscuous masculinity under scrutiny is seen as the norm and seeks to undermine it. In fact, he goes on to suggest 'men' and 'women' are fragmented groups in terms of sexual desires: 'women like you', 'men like me'. It is not clear why he feels the need to say 'as a man' but whether this is to claim he identifies with and speaks for other men, or he wishes to be seen as different from them, what is clear is that he feels the need to classify his view as a 'male' orientation.

A similar invitation for men to speak for other men is to be found in the following example:

He just lied so much, but why?

My ex lied and lied, kept asking for chance then went away again for months. I know i was being used, but we have a 3 year old daughter. I know don't think he ever loved her, and he has never called since i finaly snapped. Can any man tell me why he did this, and how can a man not love his child? He never picked her up, would give her a birthday, or xmas gift, and just ignored her.

Justine

[Extract 2]

Justine would like to be able to understand her ex-partner's behaviour. To find out why he treated the family like this, she solicits the male readership for answers: '[c]an any man tell me why he did this, and how can a man not love his child?' The assumption is that men are best positioned to understand other men's behaviour. The opinions of women are also ruled out, perhaps because women are stereotypically seen as having caring, loving, selfless attributes and would not understand. Further, as with most communication, there is probably a prescriptive element in Justine's words as she informs male readers of the emotional pain they can cause should they behave similarly.

The Invited Spokeswomen

Women are also invited to deputise for other members of their biological sex:

What am I doing wrong girls?!

I'm a 21 year old male, I'm reasonably attractive tall, intelligent and I try my best not behave like a typical childish bloke. I've also never had a girlfriend :((ahhh ok, I'm not asking for sympathy here, just an explanation!) I have become very close to several girls, more than 'just friends' but I always seem to run across the same red light. [...]

James

[Extract 3]

In this extract from an initial posting, James stereotypes the typical, normal man as 'childish'. What is more important to us here though, is his request for advice from

women (whom he ascribes childlike status by calling them girls): '[w]hat am I doing wrong girls?!' He seeks women who are prepared to give him an insight into the "mind of a woman". Within-group similarity is constructed by assuming women know what women want, and between-group difference is constructed by asking for a willing female proxy to (paradoxically) fill him in on what, "as a man", he can never truly know.

The Uninvited Spokesman

So, men and women frequently seek advice from individuals of a particular sex who are asked to speak on behalf of their group. In addition, individuals often act as spokesperson for the group without such an invitation as the following examples show. The next extract is a reply to an initial posting written by a women who says she is treated badly by her husband (e.g. she is in debt but not receiving money for housework, or help with housework):

> **Re: I DON'T KNOW WHAT WAY TO TURN**
> [...] Decide what you want. Decide how valuable you are. be willing to risk losing him and face the consequences if needs be, if he t has no intention to treat you with respect and honour. It is hard for me to tell you this, but we are all totally responsible for any siuation we find ourselves in. We are also responsible for moving from where we are to where we want to be. As a man I can tell you this, men treat women the way they allowed themselves to be treated. i can't go into too much deails here, but decide righ now to respect and value yourself. thing will begin o change when you change.
> ***Richard***
>
> [Extract 4]

Richard blames a victim of oppression, arguing that 'we are all totally responsible for any si[t]uation we find ourselves in'. So that such a bold statement may be seen as important advice, and in order warrant voice, he states, '[a]s a man I can tell you this'. His special status and insight as one of the group and yet an outsider to the relationship permits him to act as an objective surrogate.

The following extract is one of the replies to an initial posting which was written by an 18 year old Asian woman who wants but cannot find a male partner and believes this may be due to not having 'blonde hair, blue eyes and big boobs'. We pick up with the second reply:

Re: female, 18 and alone

It's definitely not the body thing. I know a lot of guys who love women that have dark hair, dark eyes, and are whatever about the body. My gf in fact is everything that you are probably. A [dark]-haired girl, brown eyes, 5'[ ]", with 32A but I love her all the same. There is a lot of things that girls don't know about guys as there is a lot about girls that guys don't know about. The best and sweetest guys I know are often the most quiet ones. These guys when you talk to them shy away [...]

Mathew

hi Mathew

thanks for replying...youre right about everything you know...you actually told me what Ive always known deep down, but hearing it from a guy has now made me believe it for real. Thanks!

Jenny

[Extract 5]

For Matthew, masculinity and femininity are said to be distinct and only those of the corresponding sex can know everything about their sex: 'There is a lot of things that girls don't know about guys as there is a lot about girls that guys don't know about'. This comment is used to elevate his status as 'someone in the know', so that he may write as an authority on his sex and so that he may provide an insider's view for the benefit of 'Others' (2.7). Also of interest, he challenges one stereotype, that confident men are most attractive, but whilst challenging another, the idea that blue eyes, blonde hair and large breasts are most attractive in women, he reproduces those very feminine ideals implicitly by saying his partner is a 'brown-haired girl, brown eyes, 5'[]", with 32A' breast size 'but' (i.e. *despite* this) he 'still manages' to 'love her all the same'.

The response by Jenny is a clear example of the idea that men know men best. She writes that she has 'always known deep down' what Mathew said, suggesting, despite

the constructions of difference, a commonality between men and women's thinking. However, the important aspect as far as she is concerned is that these thoughts have now received the stamp of truth having been written by an authentic source. By implication, had the words emanated from the fingertips of a female typist, they would be little more than hearsay.

The Uninvited Spokeswoman

Many women also spoke for the rest of their biological sex group without invitation. The following extract includes the original posting in full and the first response:

> **Have I lost her forever?**
> My Girlfriend of the last two years left me three weeks ago, walking out on the home we built together. She says Im selfish and do not care about her. Sadly, Ive been the typical 'bloke' and have never really discussed feelings with her. She says she is lonely at home even when Im there, and has gone back to her Mothers. Ive tried chatting to her, but she says shes too frightened to return because she doesnt want to feel that way again. Shes now asked me to not contact her, and that maybe we should sell the flat. I said if thats what she wants I would, to which she got upset and said 'do we have to do that right away?', which tells me she still cares for me as much as i do for her. Do I stop contacting her or persist to try and get her back.If I cut off all contact and wait for her, will she think I no longer care, or worse..build a new life where I dont fit?
> ***Clive***
>
> **Re: Have I lost her forever?**
> From a womans perspective, it sounds like she still cares for you but doesn't know whether she can carry on living with you, she must be confused. [...]
> ***Rebecca***
>
> [Extract 6]

Clive stereotypically describes and normalises his behaviour as that of a 'typical bloke' (possibly pre-empting expected responses from his mostly female audience) - selfish, uncaring, and lacking in communicative skills. Contradictorily, he says that he tried chatting to her, albeit after the event, and it is actually his girlfriend who is asking him

not to communicate. Rebecca does not simply have a personal view on this. Her advice is offered '[f]rom a womans perspective'. Again, this warrants voice in a culture where there are said to be two distinct groups which are internally homogeneous to the point where particular individuals can act as proxy. Clive, it is assumed, can never experience the female worldview so he should sit up and take note of the information he is now privy to; the authentic version he is privileged to have explained to him.

Men *or* Women Invited to Write as Spokesperson

If it is a common understanding that 'male' and 'female' viewpoints are different, it would be expected that some individuals would limit responses to a particular sex seen as relevant to their problem or situation. As has been discussed, contributors do indeed ask for advice or comments from representatives of a particular sex. In addition, however, it might be expected that from time to time individuals will ask for contributions from both sexes. So, for example, the contributor might want what they hope will be a rounded view from 'both' vantage points, or they may be deliberately challenging the assumption of sex-typed views. Conversely, if 'the spokesperson' is not a common repertoire circulating at least on the discussion board, it is unlikely that anyone would bother to ask for advice from 'both sexes' as this would be deemed unnecessary. In fact, instances of individuals asking for help from both sexes are to be found:

> **Can anyone help me (male or female points of view appreciated) with this problem.**
> I have been married 13 years and have two children. My husband who is [middle-aged] has decided that he needs to spend more time with his friends who are aged between 18 and 30 and that all our friends who are nearer our age are making him feel old. He is now wantng to change his hair style and the way he dresses so he feels younger, and after a short separation, has agreed to return to the marital home on the condition that he can still see his new friends and behave in this new way!!
> ***Rachel***
>
> [Extract 7]

In this example Rachel does not merely ask for help. She feels the need to say she is appreciative of comments from males or females. The request may be an

acknowledgement of the common assumption of difference which she seeks to undermine. Alternatively, it may be seen as an acceptance of taken-for-granted differences. Either way, the comments are a recognition of a purported difference between the sexes.

Speaking as the 'Wrong Sex' - Apologies, Disclaimers and Sarcasm

There are times when dissonance occurs between a request for a contribution from someone of a particular sex and an actual contribution from someone of the 'wrong sex'. This is resolved through an apology or disclaimer, and is sometimes accompanied by a challenge through sarcasm, as the following examples demonstrate:

In this example the apology precedes the comments made in the reply:

> **OPINIONS FROM MEN WANTED**
> My boyfriend is [middle-aged] and I am [age]. We met 3 years ago and both of us had failed marriages between us and 4 children between us from the past marriages. From day 1, he has been absolutely head over heels for me, totally loving and romantic, all over me. He is still the same. So WHY does he look at pretty women all the time? If a pretty woman walks past he can't keep his eyes off of her. When we're in the pub together he ogles the pretty women. I am attractive and get chatted up a lot (even when my boyfriend's around) and he takes it as a compliment that he's obviously got such a gorgeous girlfriend (his words by the way - I'm not that vain!). So if he's totally besotted with me, WHY WHY WHY does he ogle other women?
> ***Felicity***
>
> **Re: OPINIONS FROM MEN WANTED**
> Sorry - I am only a woman - but my thought when I read your message was "Don't you (Felicity) look at other men?" i do, and i am very happily married.
> ***Susan***
>
> [Extract 8]

Felicity seeks an explanation as to why her partner ogles at attractive women. She feels men are best placed to provide an authoritative answer to this question: '[opinions from

men wanted]'. Susan replies but is concerned about Felicity's request for 'opinions from men'. She therefore apologises before continuing: '[s]orry - I am only a woman - but...' This may well be made with a sarcastic overtone but unfortunately this cannot be known - one of the limitations of textual data compared to speech. The apology in the next example comes at both the beginning and end of the reply:

QUESTION FOR ALL THE BLOKES!

Hi people

Im female, 17, nearly going onto 18. I go to college and Ive just started in my second year a week ago [...goes on to describe her physical attributes and talk about the lack of male interest in her...] I would appreciate any comments, however short or blunt. I need comments from a guy's point of view you see. And no Im not fishing for sympathy or compliments so please dont try that on me! Thanks. Sorry if I have bored you!

Helena

Re: QUESTION FOR ALL THE BLOKES!

Sorry I am female, hope you spare the time to read? I think you are 17 going on 15 to be honest. [...further comments and advice...] PS sorry I am not a man and trust you don't therefore think my time or advice is useles..

Shell

[Extract 9]

Helena believes the fact that she has no partner is down to her appearance. She wants to confirm this so she asks for the comments of men to explain why they think no men have thus far shown interest in her: '[question for all the blokes]'. Shell wants to reply but recognises Helena's appeal to men. She therefore apologises before proceeding. Again, had this been spoken text there would have been access to intonation, etc. and it could have been possible to detect sarcasm or annoyance, etc., in the remark, 'Sorry I am female, hope you spare the time to read?'. Shell adds a postscript with a further apology, and again the language may well be aimed at challenging Helena's request, particularly as it appears on a discussion board aimed at women: 'PS sorry I am not a man and trust you don't therefore think my time or advice is useles[s]..'

In the extract that follows, a disclaimer is made to address the problem of replying as a woman to a request for a male point of view:

Men who get their kicks out of wearing lingerie.

This is something that I really do not understand. Guys - do you have any ideas? My ex used to enjoy wearing stockings, stilettos etc. He made this clear early on. He even used to buy his own (usually from sex shops - PVC mainly). It began to get on my nerves because he would buy himself the sort of lingerie I would have loved him to treat me to (or surprise me with!) But no ... He even had a wig! And used a vibrator on himself (if you know what I mean) Guys - what does all this mean? Is he behaving like this because he is bi-sexual or does he wear the sort of underwear he would like women to wear ALL the time? We went to a fetish club once and he got quite a lot of looks from men (they seemed to appreciate what he was wearing). My ex seemed at ease with it - but he says it's just a bit of fun and that he is not gay! Help - I need a male point of view (it's not the sort of thing I can talk about face to face!)

Lucy

[Other postings]

Re: Men who get their kicks out of wearing lingerie

[...] The one piece of advice i would give is that if you feel unhappy about anything anddont like something say so. It can get out of hand, dont let it take over, set guidelines as to how often and under what circumstances this is part of your life. Obviously im not a male and thats who you asked for advice from, but i do have ,lots of experience of this within a relationship and endless hours of discussion with my partner, if u want to know anything else specific, it isnt a problem.

Shona

[Extract 10]

Lucy asks for help in understanding her male ex-partner's sexual orientations. She feels she needs to understand the behaviour from a 'male point of view' and is unable to do so due to her female status: '[g]uys - do you have any ideas' and '[g]uys - what does all this mean'. Because she is not able to talk face to face with her ex-partner, she seeks other males prepared to speak on his behalf and, by implication, on behalf of all men everywhere with similar sexual interests. Shona wants to reply but feels she cannot do

so without being given permission to proceed from Lucy. She uses the disclaimer '[o]bviously im not a male and thats who you asked for advice from, but ...' before offering to give further advice should Lucy want it. Although she is not male, Shona tries to persuade Lucy that she has adequate credentials to speak on behalf of men with similar interests: she has 'lots of experience of this within a relationship and endless hours of discussion with [her] partner'. At the time of writing, Lucy had not taken up Shona's offer and no other postings had been made for three months.

6.4 Summary and Conclusions

Two repertoires were identified. They are distinguishable in terms of content but work together to similar ends: 'communication difficulties' and 'the spokesperson'. Though all manner of communication difficulties are discussed, the 'different planets' metaphor seems to have broad appeal, being found variously in books, discussion board contributor's writing and interview talk. Represented diagrammatically, it could be useful in understanding how these repertoires function together (Fig. 1). An adaptation of the metaphor also provides an opportunity to cast a critical gaze over the participants orientations and should help to show them to be a constructive art rather than an objective fact.

According to the discussion board contributors, the two sexes are in worlds of their own. Men, it is said, are from Mars and women from Venus. The inhabitants of the two planets have 'communication difficulties' due to using different 'wavelengths' and 'signs' and wearing 'different shades of glasses'. 'Spokespersons' are therefore commissioned, or volunteer, to represent their people and attempt to faithfully communicate their true needs, desires, etc. to the essentially alien mind of the Other. Few claim to be experts on the Other unless, like Teresa (Extract 10), they claim to have spent a great deal of time enquiring into their needs and observing them. It is so taken for granted that the sexes are alien that when someone attempts to speak for the Other they feel the need to apologise (although some resistance is probably expressed through sarcasm). Paradoxically, whilst the contributors suggest the two sexes are essentially alien and unable to communicate effectively, they continue to solicit the Other for

information and attentively listen to them, making the categories of 'men' and 'women' leaky and not so polarised after all.

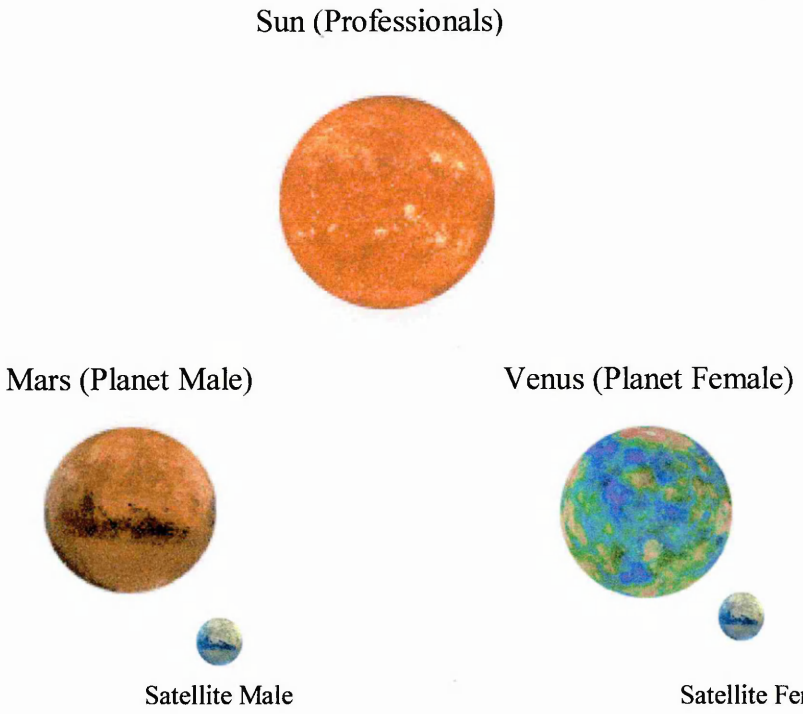

Fig. 1: The planet metaphor (Venus does not have a moon but that need not distract us)

Because men and women are viewed as alien and mysterious it is important that all the inhabitants of their respective planets present a united and homogeneous front. Similarly, between-planet similarity remains unacknowledged as it would threaten the special and polarised identities of the two alien populations. When men or women do not behave/speak as expected, they are relegated to satellite status. So, for example, Olivia (Extract 11), who is not interested in communicating with her partner with Christmas cards, does not conform to an expected femininity and is cast as a masculine impostor and infiltrator (homosexuals and other 'outsiders' will often find themselves being deported here too, though generally speaking this happened rarely with other identities on this discussion board). Such individuals orbit the group that both acknowledges their general similarity but cannot risk totally accepting them. So, as far as possible, the satellite people are held in place whilst gravitating toward the powerful larger mass. The satellite people also pull the larger mass toward them but their power and gravitational influence is relatively limited.

The discussion board contributors' metaphor could be extended further to include the sun. This would represent the professional authorities appealed to in order to warrant voice such as doctors, psychiatrists/psychologists, and literary authors. This powerful, distant body can claim to maintain a transcendental objective watch. As a respected, worshipped, and yet feared outsider, it casts a guiding light on the planets. The respective populations bask in its professional glow as it radiates a warm, comforting stream of statistics, 'facts', and 'truths' that often do nothing more than reflect and maintain the culture of the time but with an authority that commands respect. Its power waxes and wanes, though rarely totally eclipsed, as other stars such as pop stars and film stars exert differential attractions and repulsions of their own.

Whilst the discussion board offers some liberatory aspects, such as women and men often supporting one another, and some liberation from identity constraints, it is also clearly a place where gender difference is being actively constructed. In the participant's own terms, communication is very important at times of crisis in relationships and yet much of the talk serves to hold in place constructions of between-sex communication as normatively impossible in heterosexual relationships. The participants fuel constructions of commonality amongst same-sex individuals and the need for generalised views of the sexes on the basis of what often start out as descriptions of very specific and individual circumstances.

Places such as this on the internet provide a rich resource for the feminist discourse analyst and although there are some ethical difficulties such as obtaining informed consent, they could be invaluable in the future, particularly as internet access increases. Discussion boards provide an arena where attention can turn to what language achieves, with interest in the kind of embodiment, subjectivity, or identity of the most recent author of a repertoire being very much a secondary concern. In the kind of research performed here it is not necessary to look intently for differences between men and women or to concentrate on any other group identity. The discussion board contributors are taken together as a temporary group in their own right.

This is not to say that this is a prescription for the best approach - many researchers may seek to take a leap of faith and 'identify' the contributors or to rely on self-

disclosure and pursue analysis on the basis of identity difference. It remains necessary to perform this kind of research because where a discourse 'comes from' in terms of embodiment and identity can sometimes affect its meaning. What is clear, however, is that useful research can also be performed that only refers to bodies as they are referred to by the *participants* themselves. Attention can turn successfully to how language maintains a generalised difference between the sexes 'out there' whilst, importantly, reducing the involvement of the research itself in the process of constructing difference in the way much discourse analytic work has tended to (e.g. the first study's focus on 'men' - Chapter 1). This issue is discussed further in section 7.1.

Finally, it is interesting to consider the influence of the academy as it relates to this discussion board. The contributors often drew upon academic theorising such as biology, socialisation, and cultural differences, as well as professional expertise and statistics. Much theoretical and empirical work emanating from the academy, for example, feminist linguistic research (3.2, 6.1), has, albeit more critically, concentrated on sex-difference just as the contributors do here. The contributors' language assumes an essential difference between the sexes in the attempt to access 'the mind of the Other'. Such an attempt implies the Other is stable, predictable and coherent despite representation on the board of a multiplicity of identities as evidenced by self-disclosures, and of course, assumes a polarised Other exists. Constructing essential difference has been a focus of much feminist and psychological work as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. The contributions analysed here are therefore representative of a much broader cultural discourse that extends well beyond this particular context.

7 Summary and Discussion

7.1 Summary of Findings

The three studies presented here contribute to a growing feminist discourse analytic approach to studying gender. Though they are divergent in terms of shifting emphases and contexts, they converge on their focus on how an oppressive status quo is held in place by linguistic repertoires. Chapter 4 extends previous work in the field. It highlights how men's aggregate dominance over women is maintained by men in university by constructing 'men as victims'. Although as mostly white, heterosexual, well-educated and possibly middle class men they are a powerful group, they claim to get a raw deal in areas where women suffer, such as in health, education, media and employment. The 'men as victims' repertoire functions as part of a wider cultural backlash against feminism and the limited advances being made for women in the UK and USA (2.12).

The second study with university undergraduates, presented in Chapter 5, seeks to address a methodological and theoretical problem that is common in discourse analytic work and which afflicts the first study. Whilst social constructionist work on masculinities has made the important shift away from essentialist theories which harbour the interrelated theoretical and political problems of neglecting multiplicity and making change look less likely, it often continues with an implicit essentialism. Theoretical work continues a 'men and masculinity' theme and in empirical work the problem is manifest in sex-specific or identity-specific participant selection (and problems with 'male feminists' - 3.5.1). Selecting men in a study of masculinity, for example, implies that men are a self-contained group worthy of study in their own right. Related to this, it implies that 'their' discourses are particular to them and either would not be uttered by women, or women are simply not of interest to the researcher. This serves to unnecessarily reproduce difference and to absent women's voice.

The study of men and women together proved to be very worthwhile and productive. Both men and women were found to be conserving the status quo and resisting change

by using multiple, competing and contradictory repertoires. The 'equality as imminent/achieved' repertoire celebrates an alleged arrival of equality and therefore suggests change is unnecessary. The 'women as oppressors/men as victims' repertoire was also utilised by women, thus complementing the findings of the first study in relation to men. Although both men and women were included in the study, and analysis postpones judgement for as long as possible, it became clear that one repertoire was utilised only by women. Women constructed themselves and women generally as 'manipulators'. They claimed to play along with and even overturn male power through cunningly exploiting men who unwittingly succumbed to their schemes, plots and charms. Men did not use this repertoire, probably because it would be regarded as overtly sexist to suggest women are manipulative (the women can 'get away with it' because they speak with what would be regarded as experiential authority rather than prejudice), and because it would be somewhat paradoxical to claim they are being 'unwittingly manipulated'.

In line with the 'post-feminist' culture they currently live in, the men and women worked together to discursively paint a mythical picture (from a feminist perspective) of equality. The repertoires serve this common purpose by overt reference to 'equality as imminent/achieved', by choice exemplars of 'women as oppressors/men as victims' which suggest an undermining of the general power of men, or by suggesting men's overt power is challenged and counterbalanced by women's covert 'manipulative' powers. This study, like the first, concentrated on a relatively powerful group of white, heterosexual, well-educated and possibly middle class men and women. There were differences between the participants, however, and it was pointed out that drawing on identity politics is a risky affair and can easily be a researcher imposition as opposed to a participant orientation. One participant (Zoë), for example, may well be regarded as middle class by virtue of her university status, but she problematised this identity.

The chapter concluded with the view that both men and women students were participating in bolstering the status quo and therefore that a more committed turn to language would focus less on where a discourse emanates from (the most recent author) and more on what it achieves in terms of challenging or conserving the status quo. Whilst no prescription was made for 'good research', it was argued that there is a strong case for giving identity politics a more diminished role. Instead of choosing *types* of

participants and looking for difference at the outset, it is possible to study more diverse and inclusive samples but look for similarity across them.

The third study, presented in Chapter 3, explored these possibilities in relation to written text. An internet discussion board was regarded as ideal. It was language saturated and routinely dealt with gender issues. The sample was far more inclusive than the previous two studies and was self-selecting. The lack of researcher involvement was also beneficial as it avoids some of the power issues involved in face-to-face contact such as interviews. It also addresses concerns about participant's orientations to researchers who have vested research interests and are often, despite best efforts, relatively powerful and suggestive. As well as contributing a relatively unexplored area to feminist research on the social construction of gender, the discussion board also provided a further arena for focussing on language with a diminished reference to identities and bodies. Though many people divulge their identity on the internet, a reader cannot easily empirically verify this. It is therefore almost a necessity to focus entirely on the performativity of language rather than the 'type' of author.

The study was productive and showed such a focus to be very worthwhile. Two interrelated repertoires were identified across those presenting as 'men' and 'women'. Regardless of the 'real' identity of the authors, the 'communication difficulties' repertoire served to construct men and women as aliens who were unable to effectively communicate their needs, desires, etc. Paradoxically, despite the construction of two watertight and polarised groups who are allegedly unable to communicate, those presenting as 'men' or 'women' also utilised a 'spokesperson' repertoire where they solicited representatives to speak on behalf of the Other and educate them. Similarly, some individuals volunteered, without prompting, to speak on behalf of the group they identified with. Those authors not conforming to expected gendered stereotypes were branded impostors to bring their behaviour back into line and to foster a united and harmonious front. Professional authorities such as psychiatrists, doctors and authors, as well as academic theorising, were appealed to to warrant voice.

Although this kind of work is highly productive, there are some problems. Despite a concern for difference (2.8, 2.9, 2.11), it is simply not possible to take into account all the different identities presented on the discussion boards, even if this was desired. This

is not only due to the sheer number of permutations (though this is perplexing). There is a much deeper problem with identity politics in social constructionist work. Even in a study focussing on a particular group of men, as in Chapter 4, how can the researcher ever assert with confidence that a discourse was authored *because* they are *particular types* of person, when each individual represents a unique identity matrix, and when identities are, in any case, constructed in multiple and contradictory ways by each individual as they shift in discourse? How many representatives of a particular identity combination does one require to have confidence that a discourse is available to that 'group' as a whole (and can there ever be such a thing as a 'group' with so many possible identity matrices anyway)?

The internet discussion boards make very visible the problem that an identity can never be ascertained with confidence for four main reasons. Firstly, identity is virtual. Even in 'real' life it is virtual and elusive but the problem is more pronounced on the net. Second, there is often too little text too get a handle on identity from the participants perspective (and how much text is *enough* anyway?). Third, and related to all forms of text, identity is constantly shifting in discourse and 'identity' is therefore a very crude and static representation indeed. Fourth, a focus on the participant's generalised view of self (i.e. by asking them) would be a return to empiricism and the humanist subject and would have to place truth value or at least greater validity on the individual's self-descriptions (which cannot be solicited in surreptitious studies anyway). With so many problems one wonders if there is any point holding onto the handrails of identity politics. Is identity a useful concept?

Would it be more appropriate to concentrate on language and what it achieves without any reference to the type of body or identity authoring it? This would be a radical and very committed anti-essentialist step. The internet study did not stop far short of this. Participant's self-presentations as a particular sex identity (often only through the use of names) were retained during the analysis but little attention was given to them beyond the participant's own orientations. The focus was on similarity rather than difference and on what language achieved in its constructions of the world 'out there' rather than the participant's world 'in here'. In other words, the analysis focused little on how the individual was constructing subjectivity and more on how they

constructed sex and gender more generally, for example, in terms of communication difficulties.

Unfortunately, such a strong focus on language and neglect of identities of authors runs the risk of being offensive to those participants who wish to maintain a strong sense of relatively stable identity. Also, social constructionist feminists and multiracial feminists, amongst others, have argued for the positive move to giving more attention to differences between identities (2.8 to 2.11). Paying sufficient attention to multiplicity and ceaselessly shifting identities rather than dismissing identity politics could be seen as 'over-egging the cake' and return us to a position where it is once again impossible to compare and contrast *net* differences. In feminisms that have neglected difference this was often the result of ignorance or concern that it would detract from a harmonious front. In the strong social constructionist view espoused here, individual identities are not so much seen as the same, but rather, they are so different, multiple and protean as to be difficult to research, which ultimately results in a similar disrespect for net 'difference'.

It is not always necessary, however, for overtly politically motivated research to proceed by looking for difference. In the internet study, even if it could be ascertained (which it cannot) what *type* of person claims that the sexes are incommunicado, the constructive effect is the same - to construct two diametrically opposed and internally homogeneous groups. Two problems remain, however. One, some discourses are not equally available to all groups. Men in the second study, for example, did not use the 'women as manipulators' repertoire. Without some attention to embodiment or identity, this difference would have been glossed over. Two, and related to this, there are problems with accountability. If two 'groups' such as 'men' and 'women' are studied (but not acknowledged) but only men utilise a particular sexist discourse, for example, women become implicated, thus blaming the victims and letting men off the hook because they are not a special case.

So, whilst much discourse analytic work on gender has ignored similarity and relied on crude notions of identity, a total turn away from identities would mean a focus only on similarity and an inability to spot differences. Neither approach seems ideal. Chapter 4 is neat in its simplicity but absents women's voice. Chapter 6 is very

inclusive in terms of sampling but identity remains elusive (although this particular context requires caution over identifying participants anyway). Overall, Chapter 5 represents a more balanced approach. Like the others it has weaknesses, such as a relatively exclusive sample, but within its sampling frame limitations, it foregrounds language rather than identity, concentrating on what discourses achieve. It does, however, keep identities in sight, which permitted an analysis of two discourses used by both men and women and one which was used only by women.

Whilst such an approach is balanced, this should not be read 'better'. To function, the approach has to be self-consciously acknowledged as contradictory, both constructing yet deconstructing identity. This paradoxical situation is complex and could serve to exclude those who do not understand it. It is, however, symptomatic of attempting to challenge a discursively mediated oppressive status quo with the only tool available - more language. All three approaches used here have pros and cons and none represent an ideal or best approach. All are capable of producing politically efficacious research.

The benefits of a more relaxed approach to identity could stretch to dealing proactively with the polarisation between feminism and the anti-feminist backlash (2.12). Whilst many of those who seek to change, or conserve, the status quo would find it politically useful to maintain definitional integrity and neat categorical polarity, and some would resist the suggestion that things are more complex and messy, this binary can be deconstructed. As discussed, in particular in section 5.3, the feminist researcher, for example, can play a part in maintaining the status quo despite their political persuasions (Extract 3). Similarly, those who generally seek to defend the status quo are likely, from time to time, to express egalitarian, feminist and other progressive discourses even if they are unaware of this.

The two political poles are ideals to which the individual aspires but in practice most individuals will express competing, contradictory discourses. If feminists can be shown to play a part in the reproduction of inequality (few seem to critically analyse their own contributions to interview data, for example, in this field), there is less room for any complacency. Further, an 'honest' approach to contradiction will to some extent foil attempts to undermine feminists when they contribute to inequalities. The present

researcher has experienced many attempts to question his feminist convictions by those pointing to contradictory behaviour. Whilst this is important and openly welcomed, it is also noticeable that many such attempts are uttered with the un/said subtext: 'Your politics is unworkable. You're hypocrites. If *even* feminists can't get it right why should *I* bother?'

Conversely, if those who stand in opposition to feminism and thwart change can be shown to be communicating feminist and progressive discourses from time to time, this shows they are capable of such positions and that they are not so oppositional, alien and clearly defined after all (or less optimistically, but in a manner similar to the committed feminist, the individual could try even harder to maintain a coherent political self). Being a 'feminist' or an 'anti-feminist', or 'conservative' or 'progressive' are as much ceaseless performative linguistic achievements as 'being' a 'man' or a 'women', or 'black' or 'white', etc. and few people will manage to construct any identity without contradiction. Such contradictions could be calmly and openly explored.

7.2 Future Directions - Going Digital

Some suggestions for future directions have been made elsewhere in the thesis, such as using 0845 numbers to permit participants to reach researchers (4.4). It has also been suggested in section 7.1 that future research might explore a stronger focus on language rather than where that language comes from in terms of embodiment and identity. The focus in this section is on how the new digital technologies could aid future research. At present, the western industrialised world is going through a digital revolution. Telephones, televisions, computing, etc. are increasingly moving us away from analogue and toward digital technology. There are a number of technological advances that could be put to very good use in academic research of the kind presented here.

Some of these can be highlighted by way of a tour through the research process using interviews as an example. The interviews were recorded on an analogue tape recorder. Digital recording techniques are now widely available and provide some valuable benefits. Most obvious is the improved recording quality on DAT (digital audio tapes) and CD which could help address the problem of 'fidelity' (Wood and

Kroger, 2000) in research. Transcribing is often a very painstaking process, most often, because of difficulties hearing what was said. Digital recording brings with it the possibility of good quality multi-track recording. With quality directional microphones 4, 8, or more tracks can be recorded individually, making it possible to record individual talk on separate tracks. This makes it easy to listen in to either the whole recording or the individual tracks (i.e. individual participants) and individually adjust the volume of each. This would be particularly useful when participants talk simultaneously. On a single track it can be impossible to decipher the talk of different individuals and very often such talk is around the most contentious and exciting issues.

The use of computer software aimed at the music recording industry such as Cakewalk© or Cubase© makes it possible to do all this whilst sitting at a PC and to alter the tone, speed, pitch, etc. independently. This avoids the problem with analogue transcribers which often permit a change in speed but not without a consequential and often undesirable change of pitch. At present, voice recognition software is probably more trouble than it is worth but this too could become useful in the future. It is possible to have a computer recognise spoken word and to word process hands free by speaking into a microphone. This currently requires the user to 'train' it to recognise the individual's voice which takes a number of hours, where the user corrects its mistakes as it 'learns' the particular intonation, accent, etc. of the speaker. We can look forward to a not-to-distant future where this kind of software advances to the point where a recording of an interview could be fed into a computer on separate channels and markers used to reliably piece the text back together as a whole, as well as the benefits of hands-free writing up.

Presentation and dissemination of analyses could change rapidly too. For example, one of the difficulties of writing this thesis was that tradition dictates a linear presentation and argument, making 'deviation' to explore tangential avenues or contradictory alternatives, multiple analyses, or making connections relatively difficult. With continual improvements in the internet and wide-scale availability of CD writers, the style of publications and thesis presentations could change rapidly. With hyperlinks in the text, for example, it is possible to give a reader the option of jumping quickly between sections at the click of a button. For example, it is easy (though quite labour intensive) to insert hyperlinks that permit the reader to jump from a reference in the

main body of text to the full reference in the reference section and back, or to give the reader the option to explore a related area, view an electronically available paper or webpage/site, jump to an appendix, or view a definition for a difficult concept.

Extracts of interview data could be presented as audio files such as .wav files or .mp3 which would allow the readership to hear the spoken text of an interview complete with intonation, volume, accents, pitch and so on which would open the analysis to scrutiny and make longstanding debates about the relative levels of sophistication required in transcription (Wood and Kroger, 2000) redundant. Whether analyses themselves could ever be carried out by computer software remains debatable but clearly in their present form computers cannot match the flexibility of human performance (Wood and Kroger, 2000).

7.3 Unattended Reflexive Concerns

Reflexive concerns have been woven into the thesis throughout (3.5) but there are some that remain outstanding. These are explored in the remaining sections of this chapter. Contradictions (7.3.1) and inconsistencies are going to be present in any thesis, however rigorously written, and are a feature of all text (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This section explores some of the more obvious contradictions. Another reflexive concern is how, and to what extent, this thesis makes a difference. This is discussed in section (7.3.2). The final section in this chapter (7.3.3) addresses some awkward and high level reflexive issues, in particular, how the academy exerts influence over the writer.

7.3.1 Contradictions

Despite the social constructionist, postmodernist and poststructuralist theoretical stance that all texts are contradictory, there continues to be an expectation that a thesis is linear, coherent, and unified. Some contradictions run very deep and are disciplinary problems but are worth considering openly. One such problem is that the present work has in many ways been set up as moving beyond Enlightenment values (1.1), yet as Condor (1997) points out, such work revolves around Enlightenment values such as

'equality'. The problem is not overwhelming unless one feels the need to be anti-Enlightenment *per se*, but it does point to the contradictory way in which difference is set up in order to claim higher ground for criticality, and also, ironically, to demonstrate 'progress'. A particular example of this attempt to present the thesis as progress was deleted from an earlier draft. The initial title for Chapter 1 read: 'Traditional Psychological Theories of Gender'. The word 'traditional', apart from being historically relative and likely to one day refer to the 'new' paradigms also, is a frequently seen but rather naughty way of setting up difference and casting critical social psychology in a relatively favourable light (Billig, 2000) in a culture obsessed with the new, whiter-brighter, better tasting, and other forms of progress and betterment.

Also, whilst the thesis shifts away from external validation in line with postmodernist thinking, it does nevertheless appeal to myriad authorities within the field to claim validity and facticity, etc. In the words of Callon and Latour (1981, cited in Condor, 1997: 112) writers 'make themselves large' through this process. It is necessary, therefore, to rehearse the reflexive point that the narrative presented here is just one amongst many, however well-supported it is and however rhetorical and factual it may at times appear. No matter how many authorities are appealed to, the analyses of participant's talk are open to further interpretation and are openly acknowledged as readings within a particular feminist discourse analytic tradition that seeks to contribute toward change as its primary and ultimate goal.

To take one further example of contradiction, despite eschewing cognitivism and humanism, the language is so pervasive it can easily enter social constructionist writing. Whilst words such as 'attitudes' and 'mind' are avoided, other words such as 'views', 'sees', 'wants' and 'feels' often find their way into the discourse analyst's writing. With a great deal of care such language can largely be removed but there is a slippery slope and totally avoiding it can appear very 'dry', abstract, impersonal, and removed from participants orientations which are largely founded on taken-for-granted assumptions about thoughts, cognitions, emotions and the self-contained individual. This thesis is not therefore wholly watertight but neither can it be. Any text contains within it the seeds of its own deconstruction (Derrida, 1978).

7.3.2 Does This Thesis Make a Difference?

As postmodernists have argued (2.9), the validity of research can only be assessed as defensible knowledge claims within a particular community (Kvale, 1996). Lather (1991) argues that in action research (and therefore this can be transferred to feminist research) researchers should seek 'catalytic validity', whereby research is judged partly in terms of how successful it is or is likely to be in encouraging transformation and change in the arena in which it emerges. As a feminist project, the catalytic validity of this work must be assessed in terms of what it achieves in the broad context of the fight for equality between men and women. This is a difficult exercise because, as Foucault (1972) was a pains to stress, it is not possible to predict with certainty the outcome of any discourse. Discourses that have been aimed at empowering women have often been colonised by others, often men, and turned against women. For example, Fine and Addelston (1996) show how the work of feminists such as Carol Gilligan has been appropriated to justify women's exclusion from a U.S. public college due to women's 'natural differences'.

Regardless of the researcher's 'intentions', any reading of this work will be made by others who come to it with their own particular theoretical, ideological, political and other baggage. Reading is a dialogical analytical process which will weave together the original discourses with those of the reader (Fairclough, 1989). The project's usefulness, therefore, could only seriously be assessed retrospectively, but some limited prediction may be made here. Unless the thesis is published, it is likely to have little impact in itself. In some ways, it is rather depressing that so much hard work will probably reach a very limited audience. It will become lost in a sea of other theses and become sedimented under layers of dust and newer knowledges on library shelves. Relative to women's day to day oppression around the world the number of readers is very small and unrepresentative. More optimistically, if one person finds in it something that makes a difference, or a secondary difference is made via citation or reference, it has been worthwhile.

However, all this is to treat the thesis as self-contained. It is nothing new for students to focus more on end products such as essays, assessments, dissertations, theses and certificates than on the learning process and personal development. In the social

constructionist, poststructuralist and postmodernist spirit in which this work is conducted, there are more diffuse effects which give more scope for optimism. Regardless of the usefulness of this particular thesis, it represents an extensive and detailed engagement by the author with feminism, gender, and discourse theory. Whether or not he chooses to remain within the academic institutional setting, this work will inform his own practice and can form a basis for making a difference elsewhere, particularly with the status, social standing, and voice a doctorate is likely to afford him.

It is also instructive to think of all the places where the author has already 'spread the word', so to speak. It becomes clear that the work has already had an impact, whether this be via a paper presentation at the International Gender and Language Association Conference, Stanford University (home mostly to linguistics and cognitivist approaches), a paper in *Gender and Education* journal, or staff presentation. McNeil (1993) is concerned that academic feminist knowledge often circulates only within the confines of the academy. So can this project go further? Again, there should be no underestimation of the impact of three years of academic feminist study on the individual author and the increased confidence he has to challenge sexism and make a difference in everyday life. Professional knowledge is often highly valued (as discussed in the introductory chapters and Chapter 5) and this can be capitalised upon. Family and friends have also shown interest in the research and the author intends to publish his findings and ideas on the internet.

7.3.3 Writing Up and Institutional Power

With one of the aims of this thesis in mind, namely, obtaining a doctorate, it is interesting to consider the various meanings of the word 'doctor'. According to the Collins Concise Dictionary Plus (1989), a doctor is 'a person who has been awarded a higher academic degree in any field of knowledge'. However, the word also means 'to make different in order to deceive', 'to adapt', 'to repair or mend', and 'to castrate'. The academic institution certainly exerts a powerful influence over writers, particularly those who have not yet been formally conferred with a doctorate and given an inaugural handshake. There are gatekeepers in the academy such as supervisors and examiners who have a large say in who is permitted to enter the academic professions as a doctor,

and who wield power in deciding what is acceptable to the academy in terms of the standard and style of a PhD thesis (Hyland, 2000). The power of the institution extends way beyond the writing process, of course. For example, there are generally academic dress requirements for graduation ceremonies such as the cap and gown and exclusion from ceremony of those who refuse to don the uniform. This section, however, is particularly concerned with a reflexive look at the thesis and academic writing generally.

The power of the institution and those who represent it, like any ideological issue, often remains silent, hidden, unspoken, and considering it, or especially challenging it, can bring about a slight sweat in even the most critical and politically motivated thinkers. Traditions and conventions bind the writer into writing in an 'academic style', for example. No-one seems to be able to define an 'academic style' but the good student knows roughly what it looks like and deviates from it at their own risk. Although the lack of definition could be taken to be a positive reflection of multiplicity and room for individual freedom, there are certainly ideological constraints at work.

As with all ideologies there is enough room for manoeuvre to make slight the restrictions but serious deviations do have consequences. The student is not likely to be threatened with being sent to hell upon his or her death, as with non-conformity within some ideologies, but they are, however, only too aware of the price of deviations, such as not obtaining a doctorate. Such deviations might involve, for example, using the first person singular pronoun ('I' to the masses) and neglecting other means of absenting the individual writer from the writing process (Gilbert, 1976), without explanation. As Fairclough (1995: 227) puts it:

> 'Traditional forms of academic discourse, especially in science and social science, demand an impersonal style, and part of the 'apprenticeship' of a student in an academic discipline is the effacing of prior identities in academic writing in order to join the new 'discourse community."

Amongst other deviations that are met with correction are under-referencing of authorities in the field, tangential explorations, poor spelling or grammar, ignoring or subverting tradition, attempts to use an unusual layout, severe criticism of the academy

or its sentinels, or introducing poetry, humour, cartoons, song, or other creative and artistic forms into 'serious' social scientific work and thus polluting it and destabilising its special and hierarchically elevated status.

Supervisors and other real or imagined external or internalised academic voices often present matters in such a way as to imply a great deal of agency on the part of the student. Yet, if the apprentice wishes to be rewarded, they are reminded of academic traditions, conventions, expectations, norms and standard practice. Deviations are met with outright rejection or defensive condemnation, or more often, the suggestion that they can either be defended in the thesis or at examination. Use of the first person against an academic tradition which privileges the objective, transcendental detachment of the researcher from their subject matter, for example, would normally have to be explained in the thesis preface or defended at examination.

Tradition stipulates that the student should not be so arrogant as to refer to themselves until such a time as they are a recognised and established authority. In other words, the student is presented with 'a choice that is not a choice'. Even though I (the current author) would never say to someone at a bus stop 'the current speaker is at present writing a thesis which is to be submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of his university for the degree of doctor of philosophy', it seems the academic traditions are either to be upheld without complaint or otherwise the student must *defend* their position against hegemonic norms. The student neophyte is unlikely to dare to ask a supervisor or examiner, or others in relatively powerful positions, to *defend the tradition* of using passive language, an observation which brings to the fore one of many (not so well) masked power relations and normative ideologies in the academy. Change in academic writing practice and radical steps toward new knowledges do occur but they usually only occur with the blessing of authorities in the discipline, that is, those with sufficient 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1991).

Defences of deviations would also need to be recognisable and acceptable to the academy. Ironically, defending the use of 'I' would usually require the author to appeal, using academically acceptable language, of course, to (proper and recognisable) authorities in the field by way of references, thus limiting the author's voice further. The reader might find it instructive to consider the likely response by academics to 'non-

academic' discourses. Would it be acceptable to simply state that I refuse to be, or I am uncomfortable being, so 'snobby' and 'up-myself'. Or would that be regarded as a rather poor, unrestrained, impolite and even threatening, academic argument in need of editing, substantiating, referencing, etc. to make it more 'academic' (and middle-class-)-sounding (even though most readers would know perfectly well what is meant by such comments)? The reader may also wish to speculate on why I have distanced myself from such comments by presenting them as hypothetical questions. Would 'academic freedom' be more accurately labelled 'academic topiary'? The writer prunes, controls and mutilates their writing (though they call it editing) to try to make it fit with academic templates and images. Such images do not necessarily match those of the writer. They are imposed (politely, of course, as 'suggestions') by the institution and its disciplinary cultures via its spokespeople (Hyland, 2000).

As Ivanič (1998) argues, many people, especially the working classes, have difficulty writing and experience alienation because a great deal of personal investment goes into writing and it is often seen as an outward expression of the self. Though the working classes may feel particularly alienated, other social classes are affected too. Bourdieu, Passeron and de Saint Martin (1994: 8), commenting on the French academy, note:

> 'Academic language is a dead language for the great majority of French people, and is no one's mother tongue, not even that of the children of the cultivated classes.'

For many people, the self presented in academia is not commensurate with the self outside academia leading to competing and contradictory discourses and dis/ identifications. I have found myself torn, for example, between using language that I know will impress the academic readership and earn limited symbolic capital in the research community, and language that does not alienate those Others without membership of the discourse community. I have tried to strike a balance but sometimes find impressing those in power by weaving an impression of academic excellence is matched by an inversely proportionate likelihood of alienation of those without academic training. For example, I have used conjunctions such as 'thus', 'consequently' and 'indeed' to purchase power even though these words sometimes make me uncomfortable and would no doubt turn many non-academics away.

With an increasing shift from elitism to marketisation in the academy generally and pushes from within for democratisation (Keat, Whiteley, and Abercrombie, 1994; Fairclough, 1995), and increasing access for previously excluded groups (supply of undergraduate courses far outstripped demand in the year of writing), the specialness of the academy is being undermined. This can bring with it hope that academic writing can better speak directly to non-academics (and therefore to many of the groups studied by academics). Whether a possible parallel undermining of professional expertise reduces the voice of such work remains to be seen. Perhaps if academic writing spoke more directly to more people, in a language they enjoy reading and understand, such claims to expertise would actually be enhanced rather than diminished. Either way, I am considering publishing some of my work on the net and outside the academic watch in a more accessible form.

Regarding the thesis presented here, though, I need to take some responsibility. '[W]riting is not just another aspect of what goes on in the disciplines, it is seen as *producing* them' (Hyland, 2000: 3). I seek the reward of a doctorate with a good knowledge of the sacrifices required. Whilst in addition to serving my more selfish needs, this thesis contributes to knowledge aimed at improving women's (and men's) lot, it is disheartening that most people in the world will not have the opportunity, and many will not have the desire, to possess the academic skills or knowledge needed to read such work.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Transcription Notation

In the interests of readability, notation was kept to a minimum:

[] = inaudible

[.] = pause (number of dots provides a rough guide to length - more dots = longer pause)

[text] = probable content

[**Name:** text] = Simultaneous talk

[*text*] = Clarificatory information, e.g. interruptions, laughter

text = speaker's original emphasis

This notation follows the format used by Gough (1998) and Gough and Peace (2000)

Appendix 2: Doing Discourse Analysis: A Worked Example

It is notoriously difficult to describe the creative 'method' of CDA but a worked example should help (using Extract 5 from Study 3, Chapter 6) along with a diagrammatic summary of the process, based on the work of Willott and Griffin (1997), which is provided in fig. 2 below.

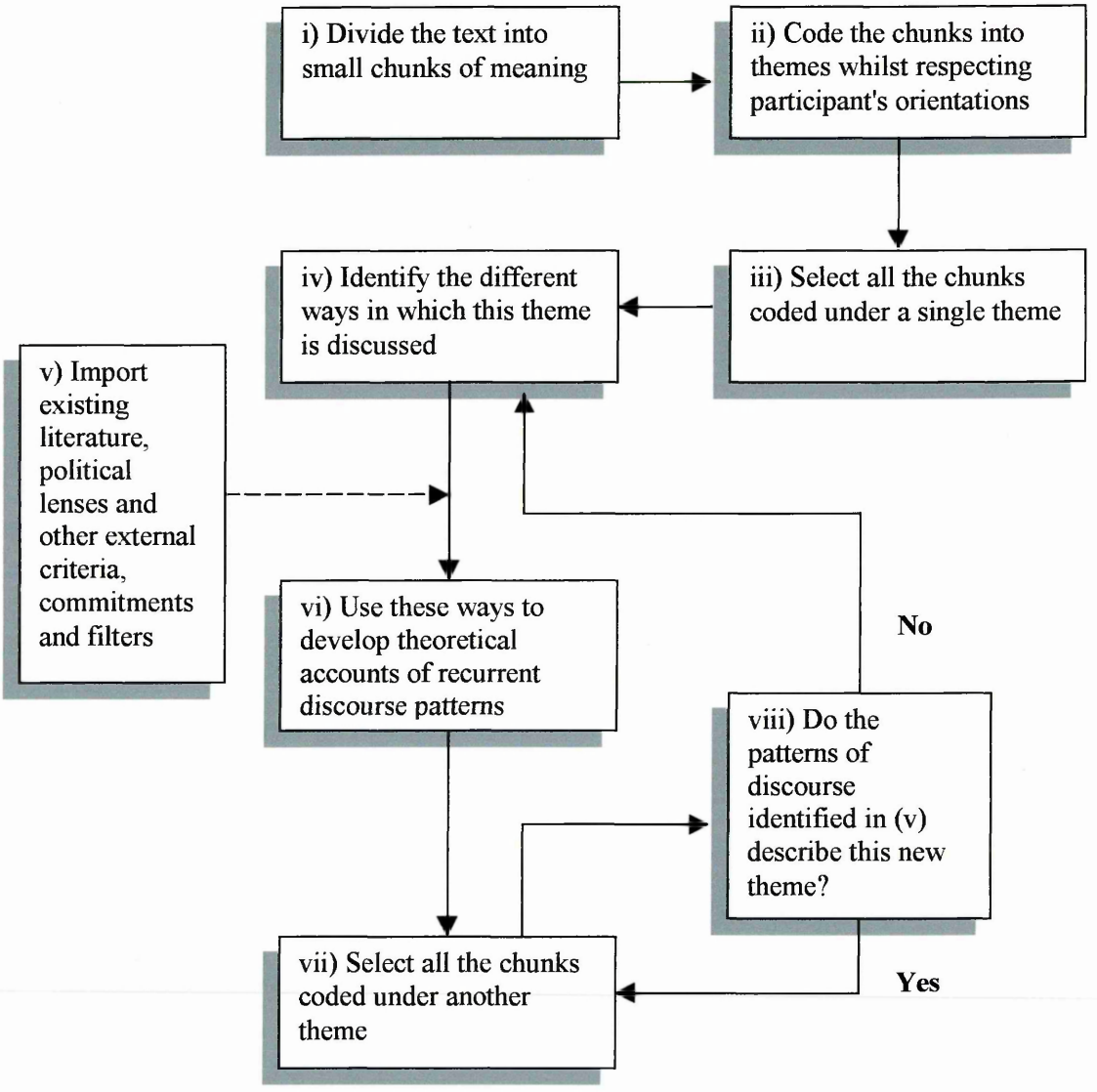

Fig. 2: Stages involved in the critical discourse analysis (adapted from Willott and Griffin, 1997: 112)

The text was read closely several times and was analysed as a research topic in its own right. There was no interest in individual psychology in the traditional cognitive sense, such as 'attitudes' (see Potter and Wetherell, 1987), 'stereotypes', 'beliefs' and opinions (see Billig, 1991). Neither was there any search for 'deep' psychological processes and desires as with psychoanalysis, for example. Reading the text was an extremely time consuming process because in discourse analysis reading for gist is insufficient. The reader has to engage with the text sufficiently to spot the nuances, detail, and the intertextual manoeuvres of the participants.

The text was broken down into smaller self-contained meaning units (i) (see the extract immediately below). Division of the text is often done less formally than physically writing on the hard copy, as was the case here, but it can be useful, especially to those who are inexperienced at doing discourse analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967) use the technique routinely in their grounded theory approach in order to work up a theory that remains very loyal to the data (i.e. a 'bottom-up' approach). Each researcher will have a different idea about how to go about dividing the text but the general idea is to keep the meaning units self-contained. They should make sense when taken out of context but without doing an injustice to the context (the context being localised within the turn of the speaker, and more generally, includes the preceding talk of others). Very often, punctuation marks and pauses separate meaning but this is not necessarily so. The numbers are for reference here and would not normally be necessary because themes and ideas can be written in the margins adjacent to the meaning units. At the end of the process the text should look something like this:

Re: female, 18 and alone
1. It's definitely not the body thing. / 2. I know a lot of guys who love women that have dark hair, dark eyes, and are whatever about the body. / 3. My gf in fact is everything that you are probably. / 4. A [dark]-haired girl, brown eyes, 5'[ ]", with 32A / 5. but I love her all the same. / 6. There is a lot of things that girls don't know about guys / 7. as there is a lot about girls that guys don't know about./ 8. The best and sweetest guys I know are often the most quiet ones. / 9. These guys when you talk to them shy away/ [...]
Mathew

hi Mathew
10. thanks for replying / 11. ...youre right about everything you know / 12. ...you actually told me what Ive always known deep down,/ 13. but hearing it from a guy has now made me believe it for real. Thanks!/
Jenny

[Extract 5 from Study 3, Chapter 6]

The small sections of text were then coded into descriptive themes (ii). Some of these can seem silly, 'obvious', etc. at the time but often turn out to be valuable later and can always be discarded. As with the grounded theory approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), this initial open-mindedness lets the data (participants) 'speak' and imposes as little theoretical or other baggage as possible early in the process. In our example, the following descriptive themes were obtained:

Mathew
1. Appearance not important to men
2. Lot of men he knows say appearance not important

3. He and his girlfriend in similar situation to Jenny
4. Girlfriend's appearance similar
5. He 'still' loves her
6. 'Girls' don't know everything about 'guys'
7. Men don't know everything about women
8. e.g. Quiet men are best/sweetest
9. Shy men are best/sweetest

Jenny
10. Appreciative of comments
11. Convinced Mathew is right
12. He has confirmed her deepest suspicions
13. As a man, his words are particularly valuable

This procedure continued throughout the whole text to identify common themes and the different ways in which they were talked about (iii and iv). For example, sometimes men or women asked specifically for advice from a particular sex (rather than offering advice). These variations centred around what would later become 'the spokesperson' repertoire (discussed in a moment) which clearly varied according to which sex was of interest and whether the spokesperson was invited or uninvited.

Another reading was then carried out (in practice, re-readings of small sections often take place independently before moving on). On subsequent readings, the researcher imposed a more intense theoretical and political gaze (v), whilst trying to maintain the difficult balance between this and remaining loyal to participant's orientations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987):

Mathew
Generalisations about all men and all women
Warranting voice through statistical frequency & personal experience
Possibly rapport building/understanding
Still loves her *all the same* implies his g/f not conforming to feminine ideal
Girls don't know everything about guys - category entitlement - he has something to offer that she has not got - insight into the 'mind of a male'
Within-sex similarity/between-sex difference (generalising)
Promoting his own version of quiet/shy masculinity? Or encouraging Jenny to be more proactive in her search for a man rather than wait for the more outgoing ones to come to her

Jenny
Mathew has confirmed her deepest suspicions
As a man he has category entitlement and his words are particularly valuable coming from an authentic and trustworthy source (again assumes within-sex sim. b/w sex diff.)

The analysis has now shifted, hopefully without doing an injustice to Mathew's and Jenny's orientations, towards a more critical look at what their language achieves in the context (local and wider) in which it appears. They may or may not be 'aware' of what their language achieves. The current research is not interested in whether such talk is intentional and agentic, or whether Mathew and Jenny are being 'spoken by' culturally available repertoires (and the voluntarism/determinism dichotomy is probably

inappropriate anyway - see section 3.4). The focus is purely on how, viewed through the political and theoretical filters of the researcher, their language reproduces gender inequality and over-generalised notions of sex difference. Brought together, the above themes suggest a preliminary repertoire which the researcher called 'the spokesperson'. Mathew has taken it upon himself to speak for all men everywhere. Clearly, given strong cultural assumptions about how essentially different men and women are, individuals may be in need of continuous reassurance about the needs and interests of the 'other sex'. Jenny had her suspicions but needed the reassurance of someone qualified to speak authentically from the position of the Other.

The spokesperson repertoire remained provisional until the end of the analytical process (very often feedback from colleagues and journal reviewers, etc. will suggest changes even during writing up). The repertoire was checked through a process similar to the simplified loop described in fig. 2 (iv to viii) and the validation procedures described in a moment. Some preliminary themes and repertoires became combined because they achieved similar effects. Others were exploded into smaller units which performed quite different functions. For example, initially, in the third study, the spokesperson repertoire was subsumed under 'different spheres', which in turn almost became subsumed under 'different planets'. Mathew's and Jenny's talk, for example, suggested between-sex difference and within-sex similarity. This is not a particularly insightful observation and smoothes over the different ways in which this general cultural discourse is deployed. The idea that there are communication difficulties (such as evidenced in the different planets metaphor) is contradicted by the idea that spokespersons can effectively communicate the needs of a polarised Other. Difference and contradiction, as well as similarity and coherence, is therefore important to CDA.

Deciding which repertoires are worth pursuing can be difficult. There are numerous factors involved here, including current research trends, the current state of knowledge, personal interests, the frequency of occurrence, and ethical considerations. There are no rules on the number of instances required to constitute a repertoire but the theme should be recognisable within the social arena in which it occurs, and, especially if it is novel, it should be supported by many examples. Allowances and personal judgement are necessary regarding the type of data and context. Tightly managed interviews, for example, which concentrate on a few topics will probably yield more examples of each theme than internet discussion boards where individuals are authoring more freely.

Finally, following Potter and Wetherell (1987: 170), four validity checks were carried out on the resultant repertoires, namely, checks for 'coherence', 'participants orientations', 'new problems', and 'fruitfulness'.

Coherence refers to the ability of the explanation to account for broad patterns as well as small sequences of text. Particularly important is the ability to account for exceptions to the rule. Exceptions are interesting because they lie outside the explanatory framework, yet if they can be shown to be exceptions with good reason, and by reference to the explanatory framework, the case for the explanation is strengthened. So, for example, in study 3 it became apparent that some individuals asked for help from both *men and women* rather than spokespersons of a particular sex. This exception strengthens, rather than weakens, the explanation that men and women often see each other (if only on the discussion board) as only able to communicate the needs of their 'own sex' due to polarisation. The request may have the effect of

challenging the assumption of polarised sexes, or alternatively, obtaining 'rounded' view from 'both' vantage points. Either way, the very need to ask for 'male and female opinions' (as opposed to say, 'people's opinions') acknowledges the strength of the general taken-for-granted assumption of between-sex polarisation.

The various validity checks sometimes overlap, as here, where this observation also provides evidence that 'the spokesperson' is a 'participant's orientation' and not simply a researcher's imposition. Any repertoire must be shown to have relevance for the participants themselves within the particular area of social life concerned. The third validity check, 'new problems', requires that a repertoire should not only *solve* problems, but also create new ones. In our example, where men and women are generally seen as having communication difficulties due to polarisation, and given a general cultural requirement for individuals to be seen as non-contradictory, the participants experience difficulties when they identify as, say, a woman, but are replying to a posting asking for 'male views'. Resolution to this contradiction is provided through sarcasm, apologies, or disclaimers. So, for example, in Chapter 3, Extract 8, Susan replies to Felicity's request for 'opinions from men' with 'Sorry I am female, hope you spare the time to read?' and 'PS sorry I am not a man and trust you don't therefore think my time or advice is useles[s]..'

The fourth validity check, fruitfulness, refers to the ability of the explanatory scheme to generate novel explanations for other problems in the field. This cannot easily be assessed, therefore, without further research. What is clear is that the 'you're a man - what do men really want?' and 'as a woman, can you explain why women do that?' type of questions, or claims to category entitlement 'as a man' or 'as a woman', can be heard in all manner of situations from the pub, to the *Jerry Springer Show*, to Soaps, to the family dinner table, and so on. In many of these situations, males and females claim to be incommunicado and unable to understand the other, only to speak for 'their sex' or ask someone else to do so. There is a great deal of potential therefore for explanation of this problem, perhaps in therapeutic settings and schools, or anywhere where individual problems become mapped onto males and females everywhere, thus unnecessarily recycling, naturalising and normalising the generalisations, and legitimising culturally sanctioned sex and gender boundaries.

Appendix 3: A Sample of Data from Study 1

Focus Group 1: 3 Men plus interviewer

1. **Interviewer:** Is this a man's world?

2. **Philip:** [*sings*] 'It's a man's, man's' [*laughs*]. [...] Wow, that is really hard, I mean it's a really, erm, shit, it's like women have got a lot of power but it's not spoken about. Yeah, erm, it's like, you know, you get your feminist people that speak, like, you know, this area's unfair to women, we want that, we want that, we want that, but I think the areas where women are in a better position just seem to be gettin' neglected. And after all, it's like, in modern theories about man -he's sort of like genetically sort of predisposed to sort of live longer but women - but it's shorter. Basically they're having shorter lives, so surely a man must be like, must have a poorer quality of life 'cus of the stress factor. The stress factor is killin' 'em.

3. **Interviewer:** So in that sense it isn't a man's world?

4. **Philip:** Erm, I couldn't give a straight answer on that. [...]

5. **Amin:** I'm just thinking about which world we're talking about! [*laughs*]

6. **Interviewer:** Yeah, it's very true but the question I was talking about, let's look at some more detailed areas 'cus it might be easier to think of examples. What about in, erm, in employment - do you think there's major gender differences there?

7. **Amin:** Oh yeah, I think the workplace is still run by men - white, middle class that's err, erm, whenever women are asking for equality, or whenever they want equality, I think it's, they have to take the rest of the baggage with them.

8. **Philip:** Responsibility comes with rights?

9. **Amin:** Yeah definitely, yeah that's what I'm talking about. It's like, I saw a programme the other day, er, er, about, I think it's one of these afternoon, er, one of these afternoon talk show things.

10. **Marcus:** Vanessa?

11. **Amin:** Is it Vanessa - and er, there's a guy on there who didn't, his girlfriend paid for everything. This chap, he'll turn around and, you know, "Want equality?". I mean, we've been paying for the room for God knows how many centuries and now it's a time when women are paying for us and they turn round and say, "it's not fair", oh you know, do you want equality - you have to take the rest of it. I think with, in any position in society, if you're in a position of responsibility, you have to take the baggage with it er, whatever comes with that and that's the *stress* when you've got, what we're talking about is the stress - the rest of the baggage with it. You can't, if you fight for that and then somewhere down the road you can't turn round and say, "but no we're women" or "but no we're not men and no we can't manage that". That's what you want, you take the rest with it - the stress to go with it - that's a fact of life. I mean, when you work in a stressful environment, you know, you take shit from the guy that's in charge, the supervisor and everybody else - you'll be expected to [reach] a certain standard. But, you know, you expect that and I think women have got to expect that too, I mean they're gonna get that kind of baggage with it. For them to turn round and say, [*pleading voice*] "Oh, we're women though" - if you want equality you've got to take the baggage with it.

12. **Interviewer:** Yeah, so, so, equality's fine but it's at a price?

13. **Philip:** Shit, yeah, yeah. [...]

14. **Interviewer:** What about, erm, it's been in the news recently with women boxers. Got an ideas on that, any thoughts on that, er, whether women should be involved in boxing?

15. **Amin:** Personally I think they should [all be at home] and have their kids.

16. **Marcus:** Seriously?

17. **Amin:** [*laughs*]

18. **Philip:** Er, I think there that the rules applied to men should apply to women, like, but it's a very complex issue because you sort of get mixed with the should men be boxing anyway. I mean, [**Marcus** *interrupts*]

19. **Marcus:** Yeah but the reasons given for not letting women box were just hilarious weren't they? "Oh, they get PMT and they go a little bit mad" [**Amin** *laughs*]

20. **Philip:** Well, it's like, I will sort of go for, it's like I think women have got as much right to box as men and like, we might say it's like, women go mad one week in four but you could argue a man four weeks out of four 'cus of testosterone. [**Amin** *laughs*]

21. **Amin:** There's cases of boxers actually taking them, testosterone injections a week before, prior to gettin' their fight, er, before the fight because, you see, testosterone, it won't tell in your system whereas steroids and whatever will. So they pump themselves up with testosterone, take testosterone a month before a fight so when you get to the fight - you can tell when they come out - they're actually, they're like just foaming, you know they're just, and I've seen a couple of fights where I can, I can name certain fighters who I've seen and they just look like they've been on something, they're just, all the aggression's there.

22. **Marcus:** Yeah, but if you look at the contact sports say, like karate and everything else, I mean women compete in those on equal footings.

23. **Amin:** They don't though, that's a fallacy.

24. **Marcus:** They do.

25. **Amin:** They don't, it's a fallacy.

26. **Interviewer:** Why do you say that Amin?

27. **Amin:** They don't because, you see, thing is if you look at traditional karate, if you look at traditional sports, like, they don't make headguards. [] It's become modernised. It's like the modern thing for the modern consumer. It's become a fitness thing. It's because sport, martial arts has never been a sport, martial arts itself, because in it's *true* form what it is, it's become modernised, "Oh, let's make it a sport, let's make it semi-contact", they're introducing footpads, it's never at all, like, I mean, you go to any dojo, any style, anywhere in the world, they don't teach the students with footguards; they teach you bare-foot, sometimes with mits, maybe gumshield, but not headguards. Because that's how, you know [**Marcus** *interrupts*]

28. **Marcus:** Yeah, but the injury potential is still there though. They still gonna get the blows to the breasts and everything else which the boxing people were saying could harm them.

29. **Amin:** Yeah but the thing is what you do is you put experienced fighters, you, experienced fighters, you get to a

certain, a black belt doesn't mean that your gonna be a champion. What it means is that you've reached a certain level. Right, traditionally speaking, with martial arts they didn't send - when they had these competitions, China and Japan - they didn't send anybody who was less than a black belt because you need to be at a certain level, because once you know you can break a board your aren't gonna hit somebody with full power because you know you're gonna damage 'em. So you learn to, you learn to just harness, potential, just harness, so when you're fighting you know how much damage you're gonna cause and the damage becomes sport, I mean, I've been in several competitions where you get two yellow belts, beginners, smashing each other to bits because they've got no control.

30. **Interviewer:** But surely men and women can compete on an equal footing whether it's a contact sport or whether it's skin deep or whatever.

31. **Amin:** When it comes to physicality, when it comes to skill, they can - motor racing things like that - it's basically skill but when it comes to physicality you can't put a man and a women together, right, to, you know, to spar or to box because the women's never gonna adapt. Even football, yeah, there was a big debate last year about football, women, er, havin' women footballers, er, professional footballers. The thing is, however skilful they are, they, I mean, women's football is a lot more skilful than English male football is, will ever be, it's just because of their size and weight.

32. **Philip:** Amin, can I just go back to the karate bit, like, would you want, say, I mean, your views don't really, I mean, you're not into competition as such are you? How would you like to have to fight a woman? [..] Would you wanna actually fight a woman?

33. **Amin:** Oh, no.

34. **Philip:** Yeah, nor me, like, you know, I mean like, in a way I accept that they should really have a right to be up against blokes but I'd feel in a right position - I just couldn't hit her, you know, and if I did I know all me mates would, everybody'd look down on me.

35. **Amin:** They have tried it in judo. I've seen some competitions where they've had mixed judo competitions.

36. **Philip:** Judo, not as bad I don't think.

37. **Amin:** But the thing is, you know when you start gettin' heavier classes, women just, they have no chance, honest. When you put a woman that's seventy k's plus, so your talking about twelve and a half stone, ok - a guy that's twelve and a half stone - against a guy that's twelve and a half stone, honestly, women just don't stand a chance. It hard division to deal with because it's one division that's about skill. You know, when you get to about ten stone, eleven stone, it's to do with skill it's not to do with grade but you know when you start getting past like eleven, eleven and a half, twelve stone, it's starts to become - the weight factor - starts to become, it's like boxing, lower weights are brilliantly skilful, right, when you start gettin' to middle-weight, cruise-weight, it's all about power, a lot aren't as skilful as some of the light-weight fighters. To me that's the same thing here. With any contact sport, I mean, some of the motor-racing, yeah, I mean, snooker, yeah, you know, women can, on a same footing. Er, I think [**Interviewer** interrupts]

38. **Interviewer:** So is it as long as it's not a physical element?

39. **Amin:** I think it's, this stuff about sport, you know, men and women doing the same sports, I think it also has a residue of this kind of, this suffragette thing, you know what I mean? Because I mean, ok., if I throw you a question, yeah, alright, if I throw a question your way and I said to you, "If you had the ability to go out and work, would you want your wife to go out and work? If you could provide for her, that she could go off and do what she wants to, would you want her to go and work? If you could go out and work and bring sufficient enough money into the house or where she didn't have to go out and work, would you still want her to go out and work?"

40. **Interviewer:** Let's put that question [**Philip** *interrupts*]

41. **Philip:** If she wants to yeah, I mean, it's like, if you sort of start gettin' ideas about the family then you've got complex issue of who's gonna take care of babies, I mean it can be done, you know, [**Amin:** I know it can be done but what I'm saying is...] a woman should have a right to work and like, [**Amin:** Yeah but] you'd be very arrogant [**Amin:** No, no] to say like, "I can keep you so you shouldn't work, you know.

42. **Amin:** I think you might have misconcept., what I'm saying is, no, she has got a right to go out and work, that's her right but what I'm saying is, right, if she's working in that high-stressful environment where she's gonna get the highest amount of stress, whatever, right, would you, I mean,

honestly speaking, would you want her to go out and work *when* you could bring enough money in that when you could live sufficiently, she didn't have to go out 'cus she could go and, five days a week in the beauticians getting her fingers, getting her hair done, and go out and do what she wants to do?

43. **Philip:** I'd want her to do what makes her happ. - what she choosed as her free will, I mean, there's like, how can, it's like, what sort of relationship have you got with her if you *decide* whether something's too stressful for her or not, when you're to say, "No you can't" -it's like, a bit like having a daughter and not a wife.

44. **Marcus:** I think, I mean, it's a very artificial situation because she wouldn't go into that sort of stressful situation unless she had to *or*, unless she enjoyed it, so, you know, if one partner can provide for the family, but it doesn't really exist does it?

45. **Amin:** Say if you had children, right, and the child's very young, perhaps two, three months, brand new baby right, and there's a situation that most people go through in their life, yeah, you can go out and work, fight for your child, your wife, would you want you want your wife to go out and work? I wouldn't, honestly speaking, I rather my wife was at home with the child and *I'd* go out and work, or my wife go out and work and me look after the kid, that's just personally speaking. [...] Because, you see the thing is, me goin' out to work, I might get less hassle than if my wife goes out or if my girlfriend or whoever - that's a fact of reality.

46. **Interviewer:** Could I ask you, is this er, would you say this is a cultural thing - you were saying earlier that [**Amin** *interrupts*]

47. **Amin:** I think, yeah, I mean, you can see it from the cultural perspective.

48. **Interviewer:** Would that be a normal thing [**Amin** *interrupts*]

49. **Amin:** No that's just, it would be probably from a, because generally speaking from the Asian communities, they tend to, the men go out and work, the women stay at home, this is a general, but it's actually changin' now because women are actually gettin' educated and and you know good jobs and, and, this is one, this is er, [you'll find it goes on] in extended families, right, I can do that. My wife'd go out

and work, *I* want to go out and work and yet there'll be somebody there to look after the child because this is the nature of extended families, where, this is the beauty of havin' extended families, this is where I think where your opinion of people, or what I'm saying is, er, English people would have, they'd have to get a nanny in.

50. **Marcus:** Is there anything wrong with that though as long as the child-care is adequate? I mean, it is with the extended family you're gettin' it for free but [**Amin** *interrupts*]

51. **Amin:** Yeah, there isn't but what I'm, what I'm trying to suggest, or what I'm, my personal opinion is, is that, er, because just the way that the occupational framework and the structure of the home and the [.] occupational environment is, is I'll probably get less hassle than a female would, right, and I wouldn't like my wife to come home every day and say, "I'm havin' this trouble and I'm havin' that trouble and", you know what I mean. It's like, it's like, for example, it's like, if you go out to a pub with your wife, you go out with your girlfriend, you go out with whatever, or with your boyfriend of whatever, you know, you go out to the pub and some guy's givin' your girlfriend, your wife or whatever, hassle, what you gonna do?

52. **Interviewer:** What would you do in that situation?

53. **Amin:** I'd probably just turn round and say, "excuse me, this is my, my, my girlfriend, my wife, you stop it" and if he continues, I'll fuckin' smack him but then, there's a problem there, if that's happening in work which happens actually a lot, there's a lot of women get, you know, "Oh, come on, come out with me", you know what I mean? The women don't turn round and say anything like but what I'm trying to get at here is what would you do if your girlfriend turned round and said - if she was working and every other day she's gettin' hassle from guys, you know?

54. **Philip:** But would you, alright, yeah, say you're in a relationship, either you're married or you're sort of, you're sort of a kind of seriousness, erm, like, supposing that your wife doesn't want you to go out to work, yeah, 'cus she'd rather you stay at home and look after the kid and like, would you take seriously her views about wanting to stick you in the house looking after the kid?

55. **Amin:** You see the thing is right, I mean ok, er, [....] if you look at it over the last couple of years, right, if you look at just the way the occupation system's been changed, the

governments have changed it, there's a lot of part-time work but who's it structured for? Traditionally speaking, traditionally right, full-time jobs - get the men in full time jobs: miners, coal-workers, ship dockers, whatever, right, traditionally speaking, right, you know, shift work and that was for the man. Now it's kind of changing and there's this surplus labour, labour force which is single mothers and what-they-call-it like lacking work. So you look at a lot of the companies now, they have part-time work, split-shift work so women can come in, part-time workers can come in and they can do the work. So in that case, if I can, if I was on the dole and I didn't have a job but my wife did, then in that circumstance it's pure economics, you know, it's stupid not to stay, you know, if she's workin', if she's got a good job paying good money then why not her go out and work? You know, if I haven't got a job then bloody hell it's stupidity if I turn round and say, you know, "You can't go out and work" - it defeats the purpose. If she's got a good job and ok in that case I'll look after the kid. You know, I mean, that's common sense because that's economics - it's just the way the system's geared up *now* over the last couple of years there's a lot of part-time work. The company seems to be geared up to single mothers and erm, you know, the women go out and work, you know, and provide and I'm thinking it's a bit of a [...]

56. **Interviewer:** Would you say that - I'm trying to sum up what you said and correct me if I'm wrong - would you say that you're willing to do what's right in the particular situation, but out there there's a social structure, you know, work's structured in particular ways that favours many full-time women and part-time [**Amin** *interrupts*]

57. **Amin:** Yeah, I think so, actually I think [**Philip** *interrupts*]

58. **Philip:** Yeah, there's a bit of a sort of a, I don't know how to describe it, it's like I-I'm totally into the idea of women being, like, equal, I mean generally equal, a lot of things that have been asked for are not necessarily moving towards equality but the general idea of them being equal and havin' as much right to go out and work and have same opportunities as everybody else but like, I find it really depressing this idea that, well I mean the findings are that relationships that tend to be equal and tend to - when they're both working or, er - seem to have lot higher percentage of breakdown, erm, it just seems a bit depressing.

59. **Interviewer:** Ok then, you've got equality [**Philip** *interrupts*]

60. **Philip:** But it's got it's problems, I mean [**Amin** *interrupts*].

61. **Amin:** [] lead to expectations, people's expectations because we grow up with, like, the expectations of we think that should be and that that part is actually an illusion.

62. **Interviewer:** Is that a postmodernist theory?

63. **Marcus:** Is there such a thing?

64. **Philip:** Oh, please no.

65. **Amin:** No, but what I'm saying is we grow up with ideals, we grow up with expectations, right, I mean, we're doing a degree and they expect that at the end of this degree we're gonna get a good job that's gonna pay good money but what happens when you get there [] and you've gotta deal with the anxiety of oh, it wasn't like I want it to be?

66. **Interviewer:** Do you think that would be different for men and women leaving this course?

67. **Amin:** The expectations?

68. **Interviewer:** Yeah.

69. **Amin:** I don't think so. [...]

70. **Interviewer:** That's a useful area to move on to actually, we were talking about university just then. Do you think there's equality in university between men and women? Take students first then we'll talk about lecturers.

71. **Marcus:** I think generally it's actually quite *biased* in women's favour.

72. **Philip:** I think it's very hard to quantify, um, because like we're still, we all live in a society where in certain areas more dominant ideas favouring men and like, you know, you can't, um, [..] it's like, you can't recover from like centuries of, sort of, man being seen as being dominant, like, the discourse is still out there, the language which we use to think, but like, we are in an environment where there's more, on our course particularly there's more women, girls than men but they're speaking up and saying what they think, this is true or that's right, whereas a lot of females choose to, so they might sort of balance with that but equality right, everybody needs equality [**Amin** *interrupts*]

73. **Amin:** If you say something against women or women's rights you get slapped down for being a male chauvinist. For example, if you look at a lot of courses, especially lately, there's a lot of women's studies, women courses, courses for women - it's not for men, specifically for men. Then, if you wanna do women's studies you can't go on it because you're not a woman, you know, you wanna go and do beauty therapy you can't do it because it's for women. You know, it's like I wanna do black studies and, you know, and you can't do it because you're not black. You know what I mean, this is a kind of, it's like a, they used to talk about a kind of positive racism [**Marcus** *interrupts*]

74. **Marcus:** Positive discrimination is a real paradox because it creates a difference *for* the discrimination.

75. **Amin:** It is, I mean, it defeats the purpose.

76. **Interviewer:** Is that what you were saying when you said it's biased towards women which would mean [**Amin** *interrupts*]

77. **Amin:** Yeah, yeah.

78. **Marcus:** I mean, look at what we've got here: we have women's only rooms within the university, we have women's officers, a women's-only minibus and, yeah it is incredibly biased, I mean, there's no equality in that at all. I'm not saying some of the ideals they're trying to promote are wrong. I mean, if women want an area where they can get away from some men making immature smutty remarks, then fine, yeah, they should be able to have that but I find the whole thing very, it's like, there's a big conspiracy plot, you know, when you're thirteen or fourteen you're taken aside at school, they'll say, "Right we'll have all the men in the gym and this is how your gonna treat women but don't let 'em find out about this", you know.

79. **Philip:** I see all these things goin' on, yeah, erm, and like you know, they are goin' on, but like, er, you can see it like that - sometimes they do, but like, most of the argument that this extreme thing with women's own rooms has counteracted it because they're saying anywhere else is in favour of men, but like, they're extreme sort of pockets countering it but like, I'm not gonna take either side of that argument - I'm just gonna point [**Amin:** Go on, take a stance] out that what feminist's answers, no I'll take a stance when I believe in something, yeah, when I'm seeing something, but like, I think it's like, well my opinion is that it's sometimes braver to say there's not necessarily a right

and wrong, you know, things are goin' on, the picture is murky, and stand on your own than say that, sort of join this gang or that gang, you know. That's what I'm gonna say, I'm gonna say that what is happening's unclear, um, there's a lot of confusion out there.

80. **Interviewer:** Do you think, erm, that the man's role in society or in the home or wherever, do you think that's confused as well?

81. **Philip:** Yeah, but can I just jump back to that thing about the women's room? Like, that actual, the phenomena of that is morally wrong that there should be a women's room, like, 'cus that can be seen as a, as a separate issue to whether the rest of the place is morally in favour, biased in favour, when the answer should be to sort of change everything so it's equal rather than sort of have these women's rooms.

82. **Marcus:** Let's face it, a group of girls on the beer can be just as bad [**Philip** Oh, bloody hell] for sexist remarks as men can anyway [*laughs*]

83. **Philip:** They tear us to pieces, they talk about this [**Marcus:** They smile while they do it as well!] [....]

84. **Marcus:** That killed it didn't it! [*group laughter*]

85. **Amin:** I don't wanna sound, er, I don't wanna sound like a [..] conspiracy theorist or anything like that but I think the kind of sort of, the fragmented images, I think it's got a point in one respect, about the images, that you know, you, you associate with the image then realise that this is an illusion, because if you look at media and how media projects certain ideas, right, it's very much like an indoctrination of the idea because, for example, every Christmas they put a Bond film on where the women'd be, you know, a bimbo, right, you know, and it'd be a lot playing on the sex, carry on films - the woman is a sex object. So as you grow up you think, "Ah, women are just a, she's a sex kitten, is a sex object". I mean, they don't go beyond the kind of, er, there's more to a woman than just the object.

86. **Interviewer:** You mentioned carry on films, that's a nice link with comedy. How do you feel towards, erm, do you think there's a separate real world and then comedy when it comes to inequality -'cus you were saying women are portrayed as this and that on carry on films- do you think that's ok and that's different because that's in a comedy

setting rather than if this person was being touched up or whatever in the real world?

87. **Amin:** See the thing about that, I think so, personally I think it's divisive because if you're not given a true account or a truish account of what the facts are and you sort of like, massaging [*group laughter*], smooth over, no not massaging, trying to smooth over what is plainly obvious, er, it's like the media's portrayal of war, they'll always massage the true account of it and I think that, in many respects, with the portrayal of women as in cinema, I think they've been taken as being the peachy likkle bimbo kind of image in the sixties and the seventies so I mean, the independent women, but, independent of what? [*laughs*]

88. **Interviewer:** Isn't that problematic whether it's cinema or comedy any more than it is in the real world - or is that separate?

89. **Amin:** I think it is, and the reason why I think it is, is because that's what you expect, that's how you've been grown up to expect what women are - they're just a, a, for example like, growing up in an Asian society, I was brought up with an expectation of a women being, ah, looking after kids - that's the expectation. But unless you actually go out there and experience life, actually get out in the real world, you realise it's an illusion - that actually there's a world of truth out there, er, I know I'm sounding that if it's been constructed something else or there's an absolute truth out there but what I'm saying is different, it might be a different illusion from the illusion that I've grown up with or, I think it's very much, it's like take, you know, go out to the newsagents and buy a paper and you'll probably find an Asian woman somewhere in it and it is sort of an image of like, you know, this is what women's there for, a pleasure sort of thing, you know what I mean? And as long you're thinking on that level women'll treat it on that level.

90. **Interviewer:** What do you think of pornography?

91. **Marcus:** [*laughs*] I don't know. I mean the thing, it depends on the kind of pornography I suppose, but between consenting adults there is nothing I don't think particularly degrading about sitting down and watching a blue film and getting your rocks off but, I don't know, it comes down to, it's all power relations isn't it - certainly if you look at things like in the tabloids - page three models, etc, who is exploiting who? These girls are normally paid a fair bit for what they do.

92. **Philip:** Yeah, I reckon a lot's made of it and used by feminist groups that sort of like, um, for want of a sort of better technical term, bullshit. It's like, um, you know, [] degrading to women and stuff but like, you know, I mean, you get these sort of things - images - where um, the women are dominant and stuff like that, you know as well - men are degraded as well. For some reason it's like in, I don't claim to be an expert on pornography but like, um, the women being dominant seems more prevalent in film than magazines, I don't know why, um, but it's like, I think, I mean, I'm not actually madly into porn because a lot of it is power based and when I think about sex to me I don't, I don't make a big issue of power relations like, I'm more into fifty-fifty, you know. But you were saying a lot of porn makes a big thing of things like that, power things, as if that's what sex is about, and like, to me it's not about whips and chains and stuff.

93. **Interviewer:** What about just naked images in magazines and stuff like that?

94. **Philip:** Not a problem with it, you know, you know, just ...

95. **Interviewer:** That's devoid of the power thing you were talking about so that's more acceptable?

96. **Philip:** Yeah, I think that women should have a right to sort of look at men in magazines if they want to like, you know.

97. **Interviewer:** Yeah.

98. **Philip:** Yeah.

99. **Interviewer:** Amin? What do you think?

100. **Amin:** I just think, I think this is just a sad, I think it's a sad, sad kinda case when you can't see beyond the image. I think, you know, it's comin' to a sad end if that's all we're interested in -just images- and we don't go beyond just the peripheral, the icon, they'll not go beyond that particular [.]

101. **Interviewer:** That's the post-modern view that you're obviously, but at this stage though, what, if you were goin' to read more deeply into a pornographic image how would you do that - you're saying you don't like the superficiality of it?

102. **Amin:** Yeah, I mean, the thing is I mean, it's like, going back to what I was saying, er, it's not just one image or, it's a combination of different things that, because you see if

you take the postmodern view that we construct our concepts from other smaller little concepts and we form a bigger concept, then what you've got to look at it is what other little concepts and to me it's just not, it's just like the natural, when it comes to women it's just not a natural, the image, the language and everything else with it. Er, you know, it's like what you were saying about that earlier, you know, that you did P.E. at school, right, and it's girl's go to the hall, er, boys go to the hall and girls go to the gym and boys, and got to go and do boys things - go and do cross-country runs. Girls are in that sports gym playing fucking hopscotch, you know. You know, that's the kind of thing I'm talking about where it's sort of like in school, it starts in school, I mean there's a guy [] he won the teaching award in New York, best teacher in New York last year, and he wrote a book and says, "I don't teach, I indoctrinate", and to me that's-that's the problem - it's bein' indoctrinated. It's like the postmodernist idea where you've got all these images - it's just superficial - there's all these images, there's nothing definite - virtual thing and you can just go along and to me you just get lot's and lot's of pleasure-seeking and there's nothing beyond it, a pleasure-seeking trip. If you're on a pleasure-seeking trip you're not gonna find one woman to sit with because if that's your mentality you'll just go and have sex with everybody. You know, it's peace - let's go back to '67 and get some flower power man.

103. **Interviewer:** Do you think that postmodernist theories, if there are any, erm, are a reflection of that hippy movement in the late sixties?

104. **Amin:** I think it's a fair, I mean it's a, I mean, what, trying to go back to something which they can't go back to [**Philip** *interrupts*]

105. **Philip:** I saw it as that - what you just said yeah, but then when I was asking [a lecturer] about the New Age stuff that confused me because I thought New Age stuff would have sort of been generally similar to postmodernism, yeah, but he said it was in conflict with it, and er, it can be seen as a reaction to postmodernism. [**Amin** *interrupts*]

106. **Amin:** Take it, right, best example of it: fashion. Look at ladies fashion, right, we're in a period now where we're goin' back to seventies styles and the bell-bottoms and the, the very aesthetically bright colours, the greens and the lemons and the acidy colours. It's goin' back, it's like, the big flowers and the big lapels and it's goin' back to that. They're trying to recapture the sixties and the seventies and the music of the sixties and the seventies. Look at music,

there's a lot of covers, cover versions of sixties and seventies songs.

107. **Marcus:** But this is just a whole load of middle-aged designers trying to recapture their youth, you know, it's not really a true reflection of society. It's just a few people having their hour.

108. **Amin:** Yeah, ok, so there's a few people but they, what I'm trying to get at there is there's a few people, middle-class people, trying to go back to their childhood but they're affecting a generation. They're affecting a generation of young people, right, but in fact not just fashion but music and these trends and fads. To me it's just like you're goin' from one to another to another, never finding what you are.

109. **Marcus:** Yeah but that's capitalism isn't it? You can't come up with a product which will last and last and last because you'd do yourself out of business basically. They've gotta get fleeting fashions.

110. **Amin:** Then they'll say well what you're being - a consumer animal. We're never gonna find true rep [**Marcus** *interrupts*]

111. **Marcus:** Of course we're not because we're told we're not.

112. **Amin:** Yeah but, being told, that's what I'm arguing that being told, we never quite search for it. All we're told, somebody said you'll never find it, you don't bother, you just get lost thinking, "Oh should I..." - hedonism. You're never actually searching for some images which is something more substantial.

113. **Philip:** I'm kinda [**Interviewer** *interrupts*]

114. **Interviewer:** I was just gonna bring us back onto gender because we've got into a big discussion of postmodernism. We've moved off the subject a little bit. Would you consider yourselves 'new men'? [..]

115. **Philip:** No, I wouldn't have thought, no way. I wouldn't any of it, ever go near it 'cus like. [] I'm goin' on what was publicised or what was, the idea around in the eighties when people sort of [**Marcus** *interrupts*]

116. **Marcus:** The 'caring, sharing man'.

117. **Amin:** Now just a second, just a second.

118. **Philip:** I wouldn't like to trick man into becomin' that and then rejectin' it, it's like, if all these guys are being [quiet] new men there's a massive, a greatly increased tendency for their relationships to break up and not work. You know, sort of not havin' careers and they're sort of like lookin' after their kids and it's like I just, they were led into a trap and um, [.] abandoned.

119. **Amin:** Well, I mean if you take it from a totally kind of, the Freud idea, right, instead of havin' babies they're havin' careers. There's kind of a substitution thing, substitute motherhood for the corporate director, becoming the corporate director and, and, er, and, leading a successful career so the career becomes the baby for them, for the women.

120. **Marcus:** Women said that they wanted 'new man' yeah, demanded it, "This is what we want" like, they got it and found that they didn't want it and they chucked it aside.

121. **Amin:** This is what I'm talkin' [**Interviewer** *interrupts*]

122. **Interviewer:** Do you think women ask for it and they're not happy with [**Philip** *interrupts*]

123. **Philip:** Yeah, women do seem to actually, they didn't know what they want but I can't criticise 'em for that because like *men* could easily do the same thing like. They could say what was ideal, perfect women, yeah, but actually *get* it and find that that's not actually what they *do* want. [**Amin** *laughs*]

124. **Amin:** No, I don't think so. I'm very traditional.

125. **Marcus:** I think it's a very obscure concept, I mean, half, I mean, Philip was there saying, you know, women demand it: 'new man', but I think it's women's magazines. You can't generalise the women as a *whole*, you know, erm [**Philip** *interrupts*]

126. **Philip:** I was using a kind of media definition kind of thing. [**Marcus** Yeah] I mean at end o'day you can pull anything together to say, like, "Oh it depends what you mean by such and such", you can relate that, you can say that about anything really.

[etc.]

Appendix 4: A Sample of Data from Study 2

Focus Group 1: 2 Women, 1 Man plus interviewer

1. **Interviewer:** Do you think there are sex differences, or gender differences?

2. **Warren:** Well very obviously. In a very obvious physical sense there are, yeah. Physical difference makes you react to people differently. If somebody looks different to you you react differently to them. So there is a definite sex difference between men and women in that sense.

3. **Joan:** Do you mean in a perceptual sense?

4. **Warren:** Yeah.

5. **Joan:** Yeah. And I think that that's changed over time too. That's definitely changed in the way you conduct your life. The first house I bought in 1971 cost me six months salary. I had trouble finding building societies and banks, 'cus I was female, I couldn't get a mortgage. Nowadays I'd have no trouble. So the way women are treated in society has altered.

6. **Interviewer:** And yet the biology is obviously the same so how do you think [**Joan:** interrupts]

7. **Joan:** It's a cultural thing, the way women are perceived.

8. **Zoë:** But there's still a big thing goin' on. I don't know if you've noticed this, like being a women, like my boyfriend [] like don't believe me when I say it, but you know when you phone somewhere up, I'm actually conscious, like, for instance, the insurance company or something like that, I'm actually conscious that I'm actually female, speaking to somebody on the phone. If it's a women on the other end of the phone I don't feel so conscious but if it's like something that's fairly official I am conscious that I am a female, and when they phone me up and I answer the phone I am conscious of my voice and I think they're gonna think 'Oh it's a silly women', do you know what I mean?

9. **Interviewer:** Have you any idea where that feeling comes from?

10. **Zoë:** I'm not sure. I think it's just [.] I don't know 'cus I think it's quite unusual, beyond being like, you know, fairly young, you'd think that them differences would not be as apparent, you know what I mean?

11. **Joan:** I know exactly what you mean. Last March I bought a house in an auction and er I asked my partner to bid for me with my money because he would be taken more seriously. I had a particular price I wanted but you have to be instrumental. It's the same a few weeks ago I actually bought a car at auction. I was the only female there. Women were very much in the minority. But it can sometimes work to your advantage.

12. **Zoë:** Oh definitely, yeah.

13. **Joan:** So it's something that you have to be aware of. I think the older that you get the more aware you become and to get on where you want to be in life and do want you want to do then you have to adopt an attitude that works within the framework that's there.

14. **Interviewer:** And how would you use it to your advantage?

15. **Joan:** Well, I have a lot of male friends so if I want to buy something at an auction I would send one of them to buy it for me to get the price I want.

16. **Zoë:** I find that, you know, on a really low level such as if it's like you want a curry and it's ten past twelve and they close at twelve my boyfriend would have no chance, you know, and if I ring up and I've got a female voice and I just say [*higher pitch*] "Oh, you're not closed are you?" and they go, [*lower pitch*] "Oh, we'll make an exception for you love", 'cus it's men on the other end of the phone. I know if it had been my boyfriend that had phoned up they'd have said, "Sorry mate we're shut", which I know that's a sort of sexual thing in a way but it's just the fact that you're female that they'll make the exception. And taxis as well. I can phone up and say, "Have you got a taxi in twenty minutes?", and they'll say yes to me and to my boyfriend they'll say, you know, "Oh no it'll be half an hour" sort of thing.

17. **Interviewer:** Do you feel that you've been used in that process or do you feel that you're using them? Or is that not an appropriate question?

18. **Zoë:** It is uncomfortable to know that those differences do make, you know, that they do have an effect.

19. **Warren:** But is it necessarily a sexual thing? That might be the way that men are being brought up as well, to see women as needing more help, you know, therefore to be assisted wherever possible.

20. **Joan:** I think that's only part of it. There is this kind of set of rules that society runs by, that changes and you either work within them or you're [not on top]. That's the nuts and bolts of it and it's not just a female thing.

21. **Interviewer:** Can I ask you, based on that sort of conformity versus resistance, how-how much you'd be prepared to er challenge the status quo as it is at the moment? You was saying you have to work within society [**Joan:** interrupts]

22. **Joan:** Well I've actually tried to challenge it at different times and in many respects I suppose that I've *won* [] erm but no, it's er, within personal relationships you can break down barriers. People accept that I do psychology at university [] but outside of here, when you look at relationships I've been in, I've been construed as a very strange eccentric. So on a personal level you can, when people accept you for what you are. In the general schema then you have to fit within these rules.

23. **Interviewer:** What about you Warren?

24. **Warren:** Well, I mean, I think I challenge it as much as I need to realistically. In a sense, you know, it's kind of, you know, cutting your nose off to spite your face, you know, you can go too far just too prove a point [**Zoë:** Mm]. Er, I can disagree, on an academic level I'd be inclined to go further [**Joan:** Oh on an academic level, yeah] on an academic level in an attempt to challenge on the wider scale which is part of the reason I am doing a university degree in the first place, because I'll have more impact. You know, in a sense yes you're working within a system but you're using the system to get where you want so that you can make that change on a more fundamental level so on a day to day level yes I will resist the stereotypes of all sorts be it gender, race, be it class, erm, as much as I can do, you know.

25. **Interviewer:** Sorry, as much as you need to for what though?

26. **Warren:** Toooo be myself. In that sense, to be as true to myself as, you know, I need to be, but to sort of like make a big issue out of every *comment* that's ever made every day would be, I'd never get anything done [*laughs and coughs*]. You know, you have to make a decision on a day to day basis of 'Oh that comment was sexist' or 'that comment was racist' or, you know, was it a deep meant thing or was it just one of these throwaway lines? Do you pick up on it or do you just let it, like, get on with the day. You know, you have to work your day to day life as well.

27. **Joan:** What about your social life. You know like, I have a place where I go, down the pub and I'm quite happy to go there [] and I'm quite happy to get a pint of Guinness and a friend of mine [] he sits there with his glass of [] [*laughs*]

28. **Zoë:** A bit of a role reversal.

29. **Warren:** It's a challenge to the system.

30. **Joan:** Well his isn't and neither is mine because we drink what we like. We're actually very well accepted in there []. There are very few place like that where you can go that doesn't arouse conflict. So on that kind of level you do challenge it and you find where you're comfortable; where you are yourself and you tend to restrict yourself in that way.

31. **Warren:** I mean, you say you're not challenging the system but in a sense you are just by indulging in what you like and society says as you said [*Zoë*] that's a role reversal, you saw that as a role reversal [**Zoë:** I don't really think that but that's how society would see it] yeah, yeah, well that's how you think society would see it, but I mean I spent four years drinking in a pub when I didn't drink alcohol and it took them about a year before they finally went 'Yeah, that's what he does, he's fine, he's great'.

32. **Interviewer:** Was that a macho thing?

33. **Warren:** Yeah, South East London sort of [*laughs*] but er, you know, you can, without realising it I think, and that's what I meant by as much as you need too, you know, I challenge the system as much as I need to to live the way I want, to drink what I want, to wear what I want, to an extent to say what I want to say whether it's considered politically correct or not.

34. **Joan:** Were your parents like that?

35. **Warren:** Errrm, well yes I was brought up in a sense for standing up for what I believe in regardless of whatever anybody else thinks about it, you know, you've gotta fight for what you think is right basically. That's how I was brought up.

36. **Zoë:** I really challenge [**Warren:** and that was my mother that brought me up that way [*laughs*]] I really challenge it 'cus I was brought up in a family, my mum stayed at home and did the baking and my dad worked at college and he'd been the main bread winner and then I really challenged the system. I'm very, I'm a fairly female stereotype to a certain extent. I'll only drink Martini and lemonade, never *ever* be seen dead drinking a pint, whereas I'll go out with friends and they'll drink a pint and it's just something that's, like, society's pushed into you. When she drinks a pint I think oh God, you know, I'd never be seen drinking a pint. I'd drink two halves but I'd never have a pint. I know you [*Joan*] do but [**Joan:** *interrupts*]

37. **Joan:** Do you know why?

38. **Zoë:** Why?

39. **Joan:** Because I've been on my own for many years and worked in a male environment [.] A, if you go out with your colleagues from work we'll have a drink and I don't wanna stand there and have a half while they have a pint, B, if you happen to be in a strange place because you're overnight at a hotel or whatever you could go to the bar once or twice and that will last you however long you want it to last while you digest your favourite food or whatever else you're there for, erm, and you don't have to keep going to the bar for anything else. If you sit there with a half sometimes you'd have three halves to every pint I think.

40. **Warren:** Yeah, I mean there again though, there is the issue of anonymity to it, you know, what if you're somewhere where nobody knows you, you know, there's this [] you could wear a dress if I were a man, nobody knows me, O.K I'm gonna sit at the bar and get pissed. I'm gonna wear a dress, drink pints and get pissed, go home, nobody's gonna know, nobody's gonna see me again, it doesn't matter, and it's almost like it's more of an issue where you are day in day out because these people know you, you have to work with these people, you have to socialise with these people. So what they think seems to matter more.

41. **Zoë:** No I wouldn't, I would say, I mean I might not appear to be particularly feminine in what I'm wearing today, I mean, not particularly feminine to a certain extent but I do uphold feminine [.] in every possible way. I'm not, you know, if there's a problem with the car it's not me that sorts it out, it's my boyfriend even though I've got the knowledge to do it. You know, I'm the one who does the house work and, you know, it seems that my mum will look at me and she says you're a typical, like, even if I'm just in the house, do you know what I mean, it's just, I just see myself, like we were saying earlier about discourses in the seminar and I would primarily identify myself with being female because it's a major thing in my life and I also feel, I mean you might not believe me, being, I don't know if men can understand it, but I actually feel inferior actually being female a lot of the time, I do.

42. **Interviewer:** Do you mind saying how, I mean in what sense?

43. **Zoë:** It's just erm certain things like erm I spend a lot of time with my boyfriend's family and they're very very, like, the mother's the person who does everything and the dad lays on the settee and he says, "Oh, get me a sandwich", and he calls her a 'big woman', 'Shut up woman', and you think, it makes you feel conscious that's the thing. I know people say it and some people say it doesn't matter but I always feel there's an underlying element that women are not taken seriously enough.

44. **Interviewer:** Do you think, well what do you think would happen if you were to challenge it if somebody said, "shut up woman"?

45. **Zoë:** Well I normally, I normally gob back, you know. If- if it's somebody I know, if it was somebody I didn't know they'd be quite taken aback and more likely to be offended, but if was to say that I'm like oh, you know, "Shut up", sort of thing but you can't say, "Shut up man", because it's just not the same impact. Do you know what I mean, it's like an insult to say 'woman', it feels, I think the main thing as well, with doing this degree, of being at one point quite interested in local government and politics and then somebody would say, "What do you want to do afterwards", and I'd say, "Oh, I want to work for local government", and so many people, all the men would say, "Oh we've had one female Prime Minister and you've seen what she did", and like all the males who've botched things in the past but they just see that because there were one female erm who [] it's like that's it, you're all tarred

with the same brush and I don't like that at all, but it happens.

46. **Joan:** Why do you think he's the way he is? Do you think that [.] he's erm just an assertive person, do you think he might be insecure, I mean does he have a job, does he [**Zoë:** *interrupts*]

47. **Zoë:** Oh no he works hard all week so he thinks at the weekend, I mean so does his mother, he, they both work hard all week but he thinks that because he's the man he can lay back [] and I've often said, "Have you looked at yourself", 'cus we do have an argument, I mean a light hearted, I mean, "Have you ever looked at yourself laid on the settee and getting pissed on a Sunday" and then, er, he says "Well she's the woman, that's what she does", I says, "Yeah but *why*?", he says, "'cus that's way it's always been, it's been like this for thirty-odd years while we've been married so *don't* question it", and I think, you know, I mean, he's got his own reasons for it and I said, "Do you ever want to do something Laura, do you ever want to stand up for yourself and she says, "Oh, it's the way it's always been, we're happy as we are", and I think I couldn't do that even *though* I say, I come up with feminine things, there's a division of labour within the house and we have, you know, you like have a level where you can go beyond. I mean if my boyfriend starts sitting on the settee saying, "Get me this, get me that", I'd just say, you know, "Get it yourself".

48. **Interviewer:** You know you were saying that you feel feminine and quite happy with that on the one hand, on the other hand you're saying that erm people are positioning you and you feel inferior, do you think it is possible to preserve masculinity and femininity, it's quite an abstract question, [.] at the same time as moving towards equality?

49. **Zoë:** Well I think that that's what is gonna happen, I don't think, like, for instance, people, you know they always say men shouldn't hit women because they're stronger. We often have this discussion with friends and they'll say, "Well women want equality so, not all women do 'cus I- I'm not a feminist and I wouldn't say that equality is absolutely essential, you know to the extent that some of 'em make it, and when it comes to conflict situations I don't think that men should hit women just because they're stronger just as I don't think a strong woman should hit a week woman, do you know what I mean? So I don't think that's an issue, but I don't think there will ever, there will ever be total equality 'cus there's always gonna be that

difference, it's such a big difference I don't know how anybody can say it's not. I mean, a lesbian is totally *different* to a man, like a heterosexual man, and a gay man is totally different to a heterosexual woman, do you know what I mean, they can't, I don't see how they can pretend to be the same. Like they say it's a woman in a man's body, like if he's homosexual, it's just something else that I've discussed a lot, if it's a woman in a man's body, yeah, it might mean he might feel like a woman but there's still a difference - it's a man and I think a lot of it is like physical appearances but they still, [.] there's some really fundamental differences between men and women. They'll never ever be equal; I can't ever see it.

50. **Joan:** And yet to me I don't agree with that point of view, and for *me* they're people [**Zoë:** No a lot of people don't agree] no, for me, people are people and there are dimensions to people [..] and it depends on the circumstances they're in which dimensions come to the front, and their gender to me, by and large is irrelevant, especially if you are in a situation which is, requires [] you know, you have an emergency, whoever can [] does it *on*, and it is ability only. Erm, and I think it is time for me at any rate that society, if it's going to get anywhere, has got to move towards that, and gender differences really erm should be not emphasised because they, you can have very compassionate, caring men [**Zoë:** Oh yeah] just the same as women and to me it is a dimension of being a person, it's not a gender difference. It's a skill difference if you want, or an empathy difference, it's not erm biology, and we have to move the perception of society I think before we're going to get to that stage and I think the more emphasis you keep putting on gender difference the less progress we'll actually make.

51. **Warren:** Yeah. The more you, the more, in a sense the more you bring up the subject, the more it's going to force a reaction from you, very much like this whole institutionalised racism thing, racism has shot back up again almost as a reaction against [**Interviewer:** There's been a reaction against feminism as well hasn't there?] yeah, I mean, I think, I think, I mean, to, my personal view of life is that everybody is equally different and really the issue is one of access to power. Everybody's going to be different anyway, you know, males/females, you know, men/men, women/women, you know, everybody's got differences for whatever reasons and what you've really, I think the issues that have really got to be focussed on in the whole, gender issues, is equality of access [.] which I don't think we're there yet but I think we're going down

that road. I mean, you can't have, you know, as I was explaining to somebody the other day, you can't suddenly turn round and make more females senior barristers or judges, it takes time. But there are more female barristers now so in twenty, thirty years time there should be more.

52. **Interviewer:** So you'd be prepared to wait for this to happen. What if some, what about er positive discrimination [**Warren:** *interrupts*]

53. **Warren:** Yeah but a job like that requires experience, you don't get, you know, you know you don't get twenty year old or thirty year old judges period male or female so that's, you know, same as you don't become, well unless you're really important or exceptionally, obnoxiously talented, you don't get to be head of the board overnight. For most people, you've got to work your way through the system. There are more women going into the system though and I think they will, maybe still not enough, probably still not enough minorities, but they are starting to percolate through the system *so* if this positive discrimination idea and equality, ideas of equality, are working, the glass ceiling that used to be there shouldn't be there any more. [*group talk*] Yes I would tend to agree with you that it is not as clear cut as certain individuals within various organisations would like you to think it is *but* [.]

54. **Joan:** Do you think that's why a lot of women are starting their own businesses?

55. **Warren:** Yeah.

56. **Joan:** That's the conclusions I'd come to as well, you know.

57. **Warren:** But, you know, theoretically, if this positive discrimination is working and all these government bodies are doing their job, you should see that progression come through, like I say, the next twenty years or so because there are women that are in senior positions like QCs and things like that, so they should be promoted to judges or seats on the board or whatever.

58. **Joan:** So what you're saying is shift the access to ability not gender?

59. **Warren:** *Yeah.* But there again, I've always thought that. You know, to my mind, posi., you know, equality and positive discrimination is really an issue of giving the job

to the person who's best suited to do it regardless of the colour of their skin or the shape of their body or whether they wear a dress or trousers.

60. **Zoë:** Like, if I don't [] because of what Joan said, I think, like, looking back a hundred years, the differences between men and women were really, really extreme. It's a lot less extreme these days so possibly one day you could look at people on ability but I think it'll happen in our lifetime that they'll be seen as, you know, and I also *think*, not to offend you [*Joan*] or anything, that you see it as people being on ability because you come across a bit more of an assertive person than what I am myself, I feel quite constrained by, like, because of the fact I'm female and I think, a lot of people see that as unusual seen as I'm over twenty and they think you've been born in a modern era sort of thing.

61. **Interviewer:** Do you think that people who are more assertive necessarily have to embrace masculinity a bit more?

62. **Joan:** I would say so.

63. **Zoë:** Possibly, yeah.

64. **Joan:** I would say so, erm, my experience is probably very [] I was the first women manager in [] manufacturers. By accident they happened to be in a very awkward spot and I could actually do the job and I'd worked with the company. If I'd have been an outsider I wouldn't have got the confidence to do that but the guy was very sick for a long while and I was his assistant and I did his job when he actually left through ill-health and they couldn't find anybody suitable. So I got the position by default and on my contract I had to wear a suit and tie and a hat [**Zoë:** *laughs*]. It was absolutely ridiculous.

65. **Interviewer:** Did that increase your confidence and make you more assertive being put in that position?

66. **Joan:** Erm, I had to be, I had some very strange encounters actually going round the group and bumping into general managers. They were invariably *men*, and I was, if you like, on the female side. All the loos were meant for men and anything. [..] So yes I've had a peculiar background and experience to bring, so yes it made me terribly assertive because I was their boss and to actually get things *done* they had to sit up and take notice and I had to be exceeding good and worked long hours, erm, and I put

a tremendous amount of effort in and I was still only paid half the salary of my predecessor.

67. **Warren:** That's, that's, that is something I don't agree with.

68. **Joan:** Well, that's the way it was and that was in the seventies.

69. **Zoë:** I mean, I admire you, I personally admire you for being, you know, throwing, getting that assertiveness over things 'cus [**Warren:** *interrupts*]

70. **Warren:** Do you think that's possibly another form of discrimination though, that certain people get their way more often and people are more ready to listen to them whereas if you are more [..] not necessarily timid, but more introverted and you take time to think about things, and I've seen this in board meetings, in fact I've been on the receiving end of it [] in groups situations, by the time you've, you know, they want a decision now, by the time you've had time to think about it they've moved on to something else and it's like "Oh he's not contributing", because [**Joan:** Yeah you've missed the boat] he's not saying anything in meetings, he's not contributing, he's not terribly bright. I spent the first four or five years at school in remedial because, well, in the bottom group, because they didn't think I was that bright. They then put me in the middle class, realised I was incredibly [*laughs*] intelligent for my age [*laughs*] you know, but it's the more immediate people who say, "Me, me, me, me", who get, and you are discriminated against because you sit there and go, "Well, like, I want five minutes to think about it", or "I need a little bit of time to get my thoughts in order", which you don't always get in seminars or board meetings and things like that. It's a common thing in the business world [**Joan:** This is very true] that if you don't stand up and say "Me", immediately you've lost your chance, you've not contributing, you know, you're never going to amount to anything because you're quiet and reflective.

71. **Joan:** I think that's nearly as important as, well I think it's more important than gender and it is important as you can't be assertive if you aren't confident in what you're doing as well. So there's all sorts different factors come into play.

72. **Warren:** So in a sense the inequality could almost be because girls have been, you know, slapped on the wrists as children every time they've tried to be assertive whereas boys, generally, are encouraged [**Joan:** Mm], you know.

73. **Interviewer:** [*Directed at Zoë*] Thinking back to your childhood if you don't mind [**Zoë:** No, no] do you think that [.] does apply? Did you feel sort of kept in your place - in a feminine position, or?

74. **Zoë:** Yeah, I think it's because you just follow your parents. Like, my childhood, the main thing I remember about it is my mum. I mean she was just the - the absolute *woman*. You know, she was the woman round the house. She did everything, all the cleaning, the childcare if my dad worked long hours to try and get somewhere and so he could move up and get better positions, etc. When he did his work at home we had business meeting [] and my mum was there doing the baking and I followed her, erm, but I mean my brother (I had a brother as well) and so he was treat differently. He used to, I mean it was the way my dad was with him, you know, he was different because he was a boy and I think that that maybe had an effect on me. I don't think it had a particularly negative effect on me *but* it was a very old-fashioned way. Being my mum never worked, she always, you know, spent time with us which I mean weren't bothered because that gave a child a better start but I think that it has also constrained me to be within, I mean my mum's always felt the same, she feels a bit sort of, you know, boxed in by the fact that she's female. She never, I said why didn't you stop on at school, she's only forty-three, I said why didn't you stop on at school and get an education and get qualifications? She says, 'cus all I wanted to do was leave and have children. That's what she had put into her mind. Whereas my dad, like, he was still at college when he was twenty-five. I think they've both got that in mind and I sort of broke the mould a bit by actually going to university 'cus all the women in my family so far, they've all left and they've all got little kids running around, all our cousins, etc., and I've actually gone to university and followed my uncle and it's like wow Zoë's like this dynamic, she's a feminist or something 'cus she's going out to university and it's, that's how they all, it's quite an old-fashioned family really.

75. **Warren:** Do you think that, possibly, your going to university is a sign that things *are* changing and that there is becoming more equality of opportunity?

76. **Zoë:** Possibly, but on the other hand, my father's side of the family, like there's women there and they're like school teachers and you know really high professional jobs, er, and they've all like been, like my dad's auntie she must be eighty-odd and she like went through university and

everything. She sort of broke the mould 'cus it weren't good at the time. [..] I've lost my point [*laughs*]

77. **Warren:** [] equality of opportunity. Or is it that females on your father's side perhaps have been more encouraged in that direction than your mother's side of the family have so you, in a sense, have got something that neither your father or your mother had in that sense because that's *environment* then isn't it? Because your mother would have been expecting you to do what all the females in her family did whereas your father would be going whatever, you know, he's used to the idea.

78. **Zoë:** Yeah, I think they all wanted me to break the mould because she, she looks back now and she says she doesn't but I can imagine her regretting the fact that she's [.] basically, you know not being [.], that, I mean, she got married when she was nineteen, not 'cus she had to but because she wanted to, she wanted to and she had me when she was twenty-three and I was the first child and think she actually wanted me to break the mould, she wanted me to be like my uncle - she saw how successful he could be at the side of what she was, er, 'cus he's a lot younger - he's only a few years older than me, er, and I think she wanted me to take that. I think when you've been, she's been oppressed all her life by her dad 'cus he was very very sexist; my grandfather was very sexist if you can take that, I think she must have felt oppressed by it and she wanted something different for me so even though I was brought up as a typical girl, I don't know if I was making sense here, you know, brought up as a typical girl, she wanted me to break the mould and be dynamic and if it hadn't been for my mum wanting me to go to university then I wouldn't have, but at the same time she's, you know, "Oh, Zoë do you want that new dish cloth, she's all you know homely, she's still the same. I think she wants me to be, you know like, both. I know that she admires me a great deal for having done this.

79. **Warren:** Yeah, I think it's possibly breaking down of these gender roles that there is additional pressures on, we were talking about this last week, on both sides, because not only is the new man expected to help around the house and look after the kids, he's also still expected, to a degree, to be the bread-winner. He's expected to go out and work, he's expected to be doing this, he's expected to fix the car, expected to do the D.I.Y as well as changing nappies, doing the dishes, and the same can be true for the women. They're expected now to go out and grasp a career with both hands *but* they're still expected, *also*, still expected

to, you know, bring up the children, do the cooking, whatever. So I'm caught between the two [**Zoë:** but then it's all confusing] yeah, yeah, it's almost like transitional, we're caught between the two discourses, erm.

80. **Joan:** I think women survive better than men though because they're used to multi-tasking. You know, the one where you're doing the washing, cooking the dinner, reading the book, you never do just one thing at a time ever.

81. **Warren:** Things have changed a lot though since, certainly since my parents day though, you know what I mean, generally, because you're not just like going [off a cliff with your parents] [] and to an extent men did as well until they got married and then they'd occasionally go to work. On one of the courses I did last year we went through this whole discourse of, well, you know, why women should receive wages for housework. I said well, rather than go to university, for the last fifteen years or whatever I've looked after myself. Who's gonna pay me? I've come home from work and I've done the cooking and the cleaning, fixed what's got to be fixed and if I didn't do it it wouldn't get done [.] and there is more of that - people are living on their own more so I think *men* as well are learning, you know, have learnt, and we're in a period of very rapid change, socially and technologically and I think that is giving a lot of [...] almost like *distance* in gender roles because you feel you're caught between, you know [**Joan:** *interrupts*]

82. **Joan:** That's why I'd like to see a lot less importance on them, I mean, with the way the world is shrinking and everything else is at the minute, erm, to me, does it matter what sex they are on the other end of the internet when you're talking to them or, you know, if you're e-mailing somebody, it's not, there's a lot of distance communication now and gender is perhaps not a thing.

83. **Zoë:** But something I noticed yesterday, it was really interesting, you said something about the men looking after the kids, the new man and everything, I'd like to think that my partner is partially moving towards the new man in that he does more cooking than me - probably because I would just burn everything - er, and he does more cooking and I will come home when I've been here all day and he's been working mornings erm and he'll Hoover the house and stuff like that but one of the most interesting things about that I pointed out, and I'm sure this revolves around gender, is that he's got two children to his

first marriage and they're nine and seven, we took them out yesterday and I find that he's their dad and I'm only like his girlfriend, he's their dad and known them all their life and I've only known them for a year sort of thing, and we took 'em for a meal and his son was saying to me, er "mum, I mean Zoë ('cus he gets me confused), Zoë can I do this, Zoë can I do this", if they want something they'll ask me. I mean I'm like their mother figure while they're actually out which, nasty to think of it as somebody else's kids but, you know, I'm their mother figure, and they don't say 'daddy', their dad's like, he's the person in charge of everything, but they always ask *me* and I'm sure that's a gender thing because you ask the mum don't you when you're [.] and even though [.] do you know what I mean? It's quite, it's quite strange they always seem to ask me like, "Zoë can I do so and so", and their dad's sat at the table and, "Zoë can I have a wonder around in this restaurant", sort of thing and, "Zoë can I do this", it's not 'dad'.

84. **Joan:** Do you think that's because when they're at home, when they used to live with their mother or she had them on her own, she is their authority figure [**Zoë:** yeah] and always has been, the females always been the authority in their situation or since she split up with their father? So maybe to them they're just continuing the path, a habit if you want, that's been set all their life, so if you took someone else's kids out it would be different. They would ask either equally the nearest at hand or whatever [**Warren:** Or whoever they thought would give the appropriate response! [*laughs*]] Well, knowing kids, yes, they'd manipulate the system, the situation, so yeah, I would say to you that they are habituated or whatever the correct phrase is 'cus I've forgotten now, if their normal mode is to ask the mother because she is their authority figure choose whether she's got a partner or whatever.

85. **Warren:** I mean that just *happens* in that situation to fall into a traditional view [**Zoë:** *interrupts*]

[etc.]

Appendix 5: A Sample of Data from Study 3

Names, dates and other identifying information have been deleted. Background graphics have also been deleted and some minor changes to spacing have been made. In all other respects, the extracts are exactly as they appeared on the discussion boards.

1. Why can't men open up?
   According to the book I am reading at the moment, title 'Why can't men open up', 400 leading psychiatrists were asked why marriages fail, 45% said the primary cause was the husband's inability to communicate his feelings.
   A Doctor surveyed 1000 people, he found that the change most women want is for men to talk about their feelings, the change men want most is to be understood without having to talk about their feelings.
   It also says that life to men is one competition after another, and it is normal that they are so attentive when courting us, they are sensitive to us and talk about how they feel cos they know they have to to win the prize - us, once we are obtained, they go back to their normal self, ie. not talking about their feelings.
   This is all my hubby to a tee, I'm so glad it is normal. (I think!!!)
   Post a Reply
   - Re: Why can't men open up?
     I smiled when reading your message. I recently bought a book titled 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus'written by a Dr. John Gray....I could barely put it down ! Despite being written by a man (!?) - is was a superb insight/guide for understanding male-female relationships. Totally facinating. I could relate to so many of the instances he cites, especially with conflicts between men and women, why they happen, how both see eachother through different shades of glasses. We so easily mis-interpret our partners signals as we are both using different signs. Having read the book it made me wonder why we live with men at all, except for sex and having children. I am a heterosexual through and through, but, on paper, it would be better if we lived with women and used men for the aforementioned ! Sex seems to be the one area where men and women speak the same langugage. Men do talk about their feelings, its just we can't hear it. Women can talk and talk to a female friend, but when we talk to a man he feels he must offer solutions. i.e. "I am so tired today, I hate my boss, he gets on my nerves" - male parter replies, "Why don't you look for another job, you are too good for that place" .... instead we would prefer to hear, "Don't let him get to you love, come on, I am taking you out tonight, where would you like to eat". This is just a very small example. Try the book. It could improve your communicaion and understanding. It sure has mine !.
     Post a Reply

2. Have I lost her forever?
   My Girlfriend of the last two years left me three weeks ago, walking out on the home we built together.She says Im selfish and do not care about her.Sadly, Ive been the typical 'bloke' and have never really discussed feelings with her.She says she is lonely at home even when Im there, and has gone back to her Mothers.Ive tried chatting to her, but she says shes too frightened to return because she doesnt want to feel that way again.Shes now asked me to not contact her, and that maybe

we should sell the flat. I said if thats what she wants I would, to which she got upset and said 'do we have to do that right away?', which tells me she still cares for me as much as i do for her.Do I stop contacting her or persist to try and get her back.If I cut off all contact and wait for her, will she think I no longer care, or worse..build a new life where I dont fit?

Post a Reply

- Re: Have I lost her forever?
  From a womans perspective, it sounds like she still cares for you but doesn't know whether she can carry on living with you, she must be confused. You must ask yourself if you could really change and not be such a 'bloke'? I think you should tell her that you haven't given up on the relationship and will hang onto the flat for a little longer until she's sure its what she wants and that your there for her if she needs you. Even so, you can't wait around forever so how long you give her is up to you. It depends on how deeply you feel about her. I wish you all the best and hope you get back together, but I think you've got some serious changing to do if its going to last. (thats if you believe that people can or should change to please their partners).

  Post a Reply

  - Re: Re: Have I lost her forever?
    Yes, its true, individuals should be 'themselves' and not have to drastically change for another person; however this does depend a lot on what needs 'changing'. This is the time that you need to do some thinking aswell as her. You both made a committment to buying and property and living together and therfore a committment to eachother too. Many say that living together is a real way of getting to know eachother..again, you say you agree you were the 'typical bloke' but you have to realise that when you are with a partner you don't simply move out of your parents and carry on doing as you have always done. You have another person to consider. Were you doing lots of things together..were you treating her like your mum? and therfore just 'living' together rather than sharing your life? You have not pledged your undying love for your girlfriend, nor have you said you are broken hearted, this may because you DO have a problem showing/sharing emotions, it also may be that the emotions are just not there. Again, time to think how you really feel and what you really want out of this relationship, your life now and your life in the future. If you are sure this is the lady you want in your life you have to show how much she means to you and that she is worth fighting for and sorting all this out. If that means pulling out all the stops, then pull them out you must. It does not take a great imagination. Large bouquet of flowers sent to where she works or the same to her mums house. Write her a love letter telling her how you feel, with a single rose attached or a bottle of her favourite perfume. You could ask if she would come to the flat for a meal, to talk thinks out, light the candles, get flowers, cook for her the works. But all this only if it is WHAT YOU want. You do not say your age? or how long you have known eachother? Not that it is really relevant, but can have a bearing on things. Do some hard thinking and when you know what you really want and if you are prepared to work at this relationship you cannot sit back and wait for things to happen, wait for her to have 'time', if you want this woman GO

FOR IT!!
Post a Reply

- Re: Have I lost her forever?
  Harsh as this may sound, you have'nt lost her, she's gone. People do not just walk out of a relationship, a lot of thought is involved. Think about it, she's asked you not to contact her, to allow her to forget you. I am sure she cares about you, but no more than she does for her family and friends.

  Just remember she walked away because she's unhappy, and you would probably have done the same. Stay as friends, but don't raise your hopes. If after two years together someone can't accept you for who you are- then its over.

  Lots and lots of good luck.
  Post a Reply
- Re: Have I lost her forever?
  Just like your girlfriend, I also left my partner of 2 years and walked out of our home. I felt trapped in an unexciting existence. We just had very different perspectives on what made the other 'tick'. I wanted holidays and evenings out with friends, he wanted to stay in and said that we couldn't go on holidays abroad because we had a mortgage to pay and would have to wait until we were in our old age! I felt that I was watching every one else live their lives while being deprived the right to live mine. I also inevitably became attracted to a work colleague (who I am still with now).
  The split was very painful, not just for him but for me too. I didn't just walk out on my partner, I walked out on a lot of shared hopes and dreams. I felt very guilty for the hurt that I caused him. For this reason, I thought about going back to him for a very long time, I also put off the process of having my name removed from the mortgage on the house. It has been 18 months since I left, and I am now in the early legal stages of having my name removed from the mortgage.
  Because I left it so long to sort out the legal aspect of the split, I realise that I unwittingly prolonged both his agony, and mine, and I gave him false hope because he thought I would come back. Deep down, I knew that I wouldn't but didn't have the decency to be straight with him.
  I have learned 2 things from all this and they are that; a) you can't use someone as a safety net in case you make a mistake, and b) If you feel that strongly that you can pack your bags and walk away from the foundations that you laid as a couple, then it really is over and you have to admit it to yourself and to the other person involved.
  We all make mistakes and we all suffer at the hands of someone else's, but just like your girlfriend thought about and instigated her future, you must do the same for yourself. Good luck.
  Post a Reply

3. Why do we women do this?
   Hi [name], I read a reply to a message from [name] a few days ago, and you mentioned something about always going for unattainable men and trying to work out why - I recognise that in me, that is what I used to be like. I wonder why, though? I used to go for men who were attached, married or whatever, and decide

that I would try and get them to choose me over her, because then I would feel good enough. If they didn't, I would feel like rubbish. I've grown out of this now, but wonder why I did it in the first place? Your reply to [name] brought it all back and got me thinking. And why too do we invest so much sometimes on so little evidence? For example, a man who smiles and chats to us becoming (in our heads) the man of our dreams when we know nothing of him? I used to have the relationship sorted in my head long before anything had happened, then be gutted when it didn't take off. Wonder why?

Post a Reply

- Re: Why do we women do this?
  Theres no straight answer to this one, all the surrounding details and not just what this person was doing allowed me to come to the opinions i did, and remember these are my opinions only, maybe wrong maybe right. I do think it is possibly another posting than the one to [name] you have taken most of this from. For example some people do this because they are not confident about themselves so if they are able to steal a man away it makes them feel good, the I won so i must look/be better etc. Each time they win they feel better, what they dont think is, maybe this guy is just a shit, maybe they just see the availabilty and are weak and take it. However when they dont win, they look at themselves and say hey whats wrong with me, whats better about her? Never does the thought come into their head that maybe the guy is just happy where he is. You see the kind of spiral that can start with this behaviour, first the boost, then the knock, so the need to get the boost again. Others can just have a fear of not wanting to be committed etc. A friend of mine behaved in this way as she was a late child with much older siblings, her parents had settled into a life with more time for themselves when she came along. However she was the apple of Daddys eye, but had to compete for his attention and time with her mother. She was attracted to people who were attached, She had learnt to compete at a young age and in a happy relationship, so competing when an adult made her happy. The more different partners a guy had the better she felt when on occasion hed move in(briefly i might add) shed be on cloud nine, wow i won against all these women. Then again there was the picking up the pieces and crying on the floor each time they moved to anotehr woman. She didnt realise her behaviour or why till i pointed it out, glad to say she does now and has moved on and is happy. You see now these are just a few reasons why people can behave in this way and there are many more. As for your other point, dont we all when younger see every conquest as the man of our dreams, and be ten miles ahead, for a few days anyway. Anyway glad you have moved on, every woman is worth more than men that are subceptible to behaving like this.
  Take care
  Post a Reply

4. Why can't women accept men who cross-dress ?
   Hi,

   I am a [age] year old male. Have a good job, nice house, am apparently handsome. infact my female friends say I would make a wonderful partner. However, I have an urge to sometimes cross-dress. I AM 100% HETEROSEXUAL THOUGH. Women that i meet cannot accept this side of me. it is fine for women to wear any clothes that they want, but not ok for me to do the same. Is this fair in this age of equal

rights. Why do women think a man must be gay or must want to be a woman just because he finds it a turn on to cross-dress. Are their no understanding women in the world ?

Post a Reply

- Re: Why can't women accept men who cross-dress ?
  I think it's a shame you have not yet met a woman who accepts you the way you are, she is out there, you just havn't found her yet. I think one should not really generalise in saying 'women can't..etc., many women do, they just don't chat to their work mates about it. I think the bigger problem is in MEN not accepting men who cross dress and think it threatens THEIR masculinity - when really it is none of their business! A similar thing happend in the 70's/80's, I know of many friends whoose parents wouldn't let them watch Glam Rock Bands because the men wore make-up, equally in the 60's men with long hair were often described as 'nancy boys'. Even today in the Year 2000, a gay member of parliament is ousted out, not because he cannot do his job, or does it poorly, but because he is homosexual; how many cases can you remember a female being ousted out because she is a lesbian..? ok, statistically there are less female MP's, but none the less, in general, the men think it threatens them. I think women are more tolerant than men overall, especially in matters to do with sexual orientation. She is out there, keep looking, good luck!
  Post a Reply
  - Re: Re: Why can't women accept men who cross-dress ?
    Hi,

    Thanks for the reply. i guess we just have a different circle of friends and a different experience of life. In my experience my male friends are more tollerant of peoples sexual tastes, where as the women really are not tollerant at all.
    Post a Reply
    - Re: Re: Re: Why can't women accept men who cross-dress ?
      Have to disagree with [name] I'm afraid. Although not a cross-dresser, I find nothin wrong with it (thought I'd make my position clear there). Plenty of gay MPs remain, and some, like Matthew Parris, are very famous and very respected in their fields of expertise, journalism etc.

      My landlady divorced her husband for cross-dressing and I never heard her satisfactorily explain why. She was just prejudiced. I do sometimes wonder if the male desire to "encroach" on female territory in this way is related to males' desire to be master of all they survey!(society accepts women who dress like men now, but not vice versa, so it is still female territory in public).

      Food for thought - men hate being "left out" (hence gentlemen's clubs) and so maybe cross-dress to gain a foothold in women's territory - the same reason we resent lesbians as secretly we know only women are worth fancying!!!! (irony mode off) at the end of the day many men cross-dress for sexual gratification, but I don't think that is the case here. So come on, why do women hat eit --

threatened (for once)??
Post a Reply

- Re: Why can't women accept men who cross-dress ?
  Hi [name],
  I have a partner who does thsi and dont have a problem with it.
  However we dont discuss it with anyone else, not due to the fact we think it is wrong, but because people do judge falsely due to their ignorance on this subject.
  Yes there are plenty understanding level, but what we are able to understand and accept largely depends on intelligence.
  One day you will meet someone who is broadminded enough to accept.
  Dont change the way you are to accomadate anyone, what you are doing is not just harmless, but pleasurable for you.
  Just remember to some, ignorance is bliss!
  Post a Reply
- Re: Why can't women accept men who cross-dress ?
  Hi [name],
  I hope you are in the UK (for this post won't be relevant otherwise) ... the Batchelor's Supernoodle's Advert has done ALOT for guys like you. I don't see cross-dressing as a problem ... Axl Rose has worn skirts and so has David Beckham ... it just needs time to become a)acceptable & b) fashionable!
  Post a Reply

5. Men who get their kicks out of wearing lingerie
   This is something that I really do not understand. Guys - do you have any ideas?

   My ex used to enjoy wearing stockings, stilettos etc. He made this clear early on. He even used to buy his own (usually from sex shops - PVC mainly). It began to get on my nerves because he would buy himself the sort of lingerie I would have loved him to treat me to (or surprise me with!) But no ...
   He even had a wig! And used a vibrator on himself (if you know what I mean)
   Guys - what does all this mean? Is he behaving like this because he is bi-sexual or does he wear the sort of underwear he would like women to wear ALL the time?
   We went to a fetish club once and he got quite a lot of looks from men (they seemed to appreciate what he was wearing). My ex seemed at ease with it - but he says it's just a bit of fun and that he is not gay!
   Help - I need a male point of view (it's not the sort of thing I can talk about face to face!)
   Post a Reply
   - Re: Men who get their kicks out of wearing lingerie
     For each of us guys there is something that really gets us going. For me its breasts. For your guy it is the fantasy and excitement of the feel of the stockings and shoes and the wig making him into his 'other self.' He definitely is not gay from the sound of it. Does it excite you also or do you find it offensive?
     Post a Reply
     - Re: Re: Men who get their kicks out of wearing lingerie
       This is much more common than you think, but few guys are honest enough to admit it. I havent come across a guy yet in a relationship who does not like this. I have had one long term partner who was heavily into

this and is not in any way gay or bi sexual. There are many web sites and societies etc where you can get lots of info on why men do this. A lot of men start doing this as they have had female underwear popped on them in an emergency when young and they have liked the feel of it etc. Crossdressing is usually defined as adoration of the female and certainly not bisexuality. I have found that men like the femininity of the lingerie etc and that is what turns them on. There is not very much available to men to make them more sexual visually, so i think it is quite natural in some cases that men turn to lingerie. I have also found that as well as liking the sensuality etc of the lingerie they like to see how feminine they and other people like them can be. You should not feel threatened by this, but do voice your concern as to where your supply of underwear is coming from. I understand what you say about you wanting it to be yourself that portrays this image and wears this kind of underwear, i felt a bit like something was being taken away from me, talk to your partner about this and tell him how you feel, im sure you will be reassured. You could be doing this together and it would be something added rather than taken away from your sex life. The one piece of advice i would give is that if you feel unhappy about anything anddont like something say so. It can get out of hand, dont let it take over, set guidelines as to how often and under what circumstances this is part of your life. Obviously im not a male and thats who you asked for advice from, but i do have ,lots of experience of this within a relationship and endless hours of discussion with my partner, if u want to know anything else specific, it isnt a problem.
Post a Reply

6. Going out... without me.
   So, do I have the problem here?

   Fairly new committed relationship -- 2 months -- and I feel uncomfortable with the fact that she has this repeated "need" to go out with her friend(s) to have a good time. I realize that it is normal to a point, but I am never invited, and they seem to think that going clubbing, dancing, or drinking is the only way to "go out". I am not trying to be controlling, but I feel as though she wants the best of both worlds: the security of a relationship, and the freedom of being single (Flirting, dressing up for looks, etc) I just don't see why she couldn't have as much fun if I were there too. What is this need? The newest thing is that her girlfriend wants to go "celebrate" Mardi Gras with her -- of course, I haven't been invited. This is NOT my first relationship, and I am over [age]... just have never had this problem before!
   Post a Reply
   - Re: For [name]
     Men have been doing it for years what she is doing and I think women are turning the tables on men nowadays, especially younger women, we have a new generation. I'm not saying it's right, I wouldn't do it. I suppose because she has this friend, her mum's warned her about not dropping her friends for a man, because 2 months is not a long time to know you if anything happened and she was just seeing you, her mates might not want to know afterwards. [age] is still young, though - why can't you go out with your friends - do you have any to go

out with and then maybe she would be very jealous of you doing that - is that the problem - that you want to tag along all the time? I wouldn't want a man tagging along with me all the time, it's no good - not for what you think she's getting up to, but because it would take the romance out of it. I dunno, so what if she flirts and dresses up for looks - if she has got it - flaunt it. There's nothing wrong with flirting and women love dressing up, especially younger women, it makes you feel good about yourself. There's nothing wrong with flirting as you put it, but she probably talks to blokes and you get jealous - rightly so. I get chatted up at the gym, but I call it chatting, I don't flirt, though obviously my boyfriend thinks otherwise. I like to talk to men about relationships and find out what they think of them and women and stuff, and I think you find out a lot about the opposite sex because from what I know when I talk to men, they believe all women cheat and they don't. They think women are easy nowadays, and they're not. I think men are probably more insecure than women, but we don't communicate in relationships, only with people we are friendly with of the opposite sex can we really talk. I feel sorry for you [name], it must be very hard, but the only thing is to give her a taste of her own medicine because it seems from reading between the lines that she likes all the attention from you and other men, and there's nothing wrong with that, but if she were to get worried about you, it would make her rethink her relationship and want to be with you. I know it gets me thinking when my fella goes out on the razzle and spends all night out - he doesn't do it much, but I still worry that he will get tempted by other women. I don't go out though, because I admit I get tempted, especially if you do see someone you could fancy.

Post a Reply

- Re: Going out... without me.
  Hi [name]!

  I disagree with your girlfriends actions - especially since you've only been together [number] months. When I first met my boyfriend (we have now been living together for [number] years), I wanted to spend time with no-one else and it was my friends who were in your position.

  Why don't you just go with - see what her reaction is. What reason could she possibly have for not wanting you to go out with her and her friends?

  If she doesn't want you to go out with her, go out with your friends without her. See what her reaction is to this. If it doesn't bother her - then think to yourself realistically - how strong can her feelings for you really be.

  I know it's hard, but from a woman's point of view - we get bored with men we can walk all over. Don't let yourself get trodden on. Speak up - she'll respect you for it in the end.

  Post a Reply

7. female, 18 and alone
   hiya everyone

   Im 18 years old, go to college, live with parents, have friends....yet I feel very alone.

Im the kind of person that gets along with most people, both guys and girls. But is it possible to be surrounded by people and still feel alone? Because thats how I feel. Ive never actually had a boyfriend..not because Im ugly/boring or dull or anything.....put it this way, when a 17 yr old girl doesnt have a boyfriend then chances are she doesnt want one!

But of late that stance has crumbled:I do want one! I have been asked out before but never by guys Ive actually fancied...I get the feeling that there have been guys that have like dme but have never had the guts to ask me out...I dont have the guts to either..I could never go up to a guy and ask him out unless I was sure he liked me back..

Its just so complicated

All I want is someone to love, and someone to love me back. Im the kind of person that has a lot to give, but noone to give to.

why cant guys see that Im here? I know that I can make a guy happy if only if he'll have me...guys see me as a friend and thats all....nothing more...maybe its because I havent got blonde hair, blue eyes and big boobs? Im a size 32A....not that its ever bothered me...I dont know, I really dont

please...give me any advice whatsoever..
Post a Reply

- Re: female, 18 and alone
  Hey, cool it and stop worrying! You sound real great and life will come knocking on your door real soon.
  Think about other people's problems and wellbeing and listen hard to what they say and soon you will be surrounded by genuinely close male admirers
  Post a Reply
  - Re: Re: female, 18 and alone
    hey sue!

    Me is gonna take your advice and stop worrying. youre right..no point in me worrying ..theres nothing wrong with me so theres no need to. yep.

    thanks
    Post a Reply
- Re: female, 18 and alone
  It's definitely not the body thing. I know a lot of guys who love women that have dark hair, dark eyes, and are whatever about the body. My gf in fact is everything that you are probably. A [dark]-haired girl, brown eyes, 5'[]", with 32A but I love her all the same. There is a lot of things that girls don't know about guys as there is a lot about girls that guys don't know about. The best and sweetest guys I know are often the most quiet ones. These guys when you talk to them shy away and say maybe a work or two under a mumbling voice but underneath they are usually the best. It takes time for people to crack the outer shell of these gentle souls. I think you should take the innitiative and talk to guys...just talk be friends first. Never ever look for a relationship cause it won't happen. If you look too hard...you will try to hard and nothing will come

naturally. The way you are looking you may get too excited about something that is nothing and you may just wind yourself up into a bad relationship. From my own experiences...there were periods of times after breaking up with my gf where I was looking for a new gf and I would never ever get anything. Once I became comfortable with myself and felt that I didn't need someone is when somebody came along. Just wait and be yourself...enjoy life...meet a lot of people and I guarantee that someone will just come out of the blue and whisk you off your feet. And he will become the most special of them all cause he was unexpected.

Post a Reply

- hi [name]
  thanks for replying...youre right about everything you know...you actually told me what Ive always known deep down, but hearing it from a guy has now made me believe it for real. Thanks!
  Post a Reply

8. MEN PLAYING A GAME
   Don't you think that men do not want to be married at all? If they were given their way they would have prefer to have a woman at home to do all the chores they do not want to do, give them regular sex and then go and do whatever they want to do in total freedom. Work, hobbies, where they go on holiday etc., etc., it always seems they make a compromise and that really they do not want a monogomous relationship lasting for any reasonable period of time, they want to move on to enjoy sex with a different person. None of them want children with all the responsibility that goes with it. It seems on here they constantly break womens hearts and tear their life up. The sooner women realise that men should just be used for giving them children and having sex the better it will be for women. Tell me if you think I am wrong. I am not bitter about any past relationship, just reached a relisation that I will not kid myself anymore. The more independent I become it seems the more attracted men are to me, single and married!
   Post a Reply

- Re: MEN PLAYING A GAME
  HMSO office states that(a staggering) 41% of first marriages in this country end in divorce. This is fact. It certainly makes me wonder if you are right. The statistics we do not have is how many couples living together end up separating? Your comments do make me think. It also makes me think why has this country decided to make it so much easier to get married - like almost anywhere! But divorce is not getting any easier. Getting married should automatically involve counselling - perhaps that would make them last longer ? Instead they offer counselling for divorce or break-ups ?! So the thing about marry in haste repent at leisure is no longer true. Just get divorced. It would be interesting to get some mens points of view on your comments. Do men really not want a partner for life? It seems more women do ?
  Post a Reply

  - Re: Re: MEN PLAYING A GAME
    I think you are right too a degree. But its biology, it's the way we are. Millions of years ago, men were meant to procreate as much as possible, and go and hunt to feed family and kids. This would (they believe) last for 7 years (any connection to 7yr itch?), which is when the offspring

were old enough to begin to look after themselves. Women were meant to bear children-end of story.
With this in mind, it's no great surprise that we are the way we are.
However, you say NO MEN want to.... I just think that's a generalization. I think there are plenty of guys out there, who are decent & actually do want long term monogamous relationships etc etc, just with the right person.
I think also one of the reasons why the statistics show they are so ANTI-marriage, is not surprisingly because of divorce laws in this country. Generally men are better off than women, and stand to lose usually much more than 50% of their assets if they divorce.
I am fortunate enough to be very well off. I am extremely wary about getting married, and one of the main reasons is: I don't want to lose all that I have worked years to build up. So I can completely relate to their position.
Post a Reply

- Re: Re: Re: MEN PLAYING A GAME
  Here are some of my thoughts on this subject.Not necessarily all connected and posibly contradictary.
  There are some men who want the commitment thing, the trouble for those of us trying to find one is that by definition they are probably already commited to some one.
  Whwn they do become available they are very quickly snapped up. In my experience men whoes relationship ends for whatever reason usually find some one new a lot quicker than a woman in similar circumastances. (just look at Sir Paul Mc Cartney)

  The ' till death us do part' aspect of marriage comes from a time when death came to most people much earlier. Women often died in child birth and rarely made it to her 50's (which is why the menopause is a relatively recent 'problem')

  I suspect that the average length of time a first marriage lasts is probably similar to the average length of time a marriage lasted before one or the other spouse died.

  Also working class people generaly married much later than the gentry. Usually in their mid to late 20's after they had saved up enough money (women were not alowed to work once married) so that probably only gave them 15-20 years together tops.
  Post a Reply

9. Mid Life Crisis
   Can anyone help me (male or female points of view appreciated) with this problem. I have been married 13 years and have two children. My husband who is 40 has decided that he needs to spend more time with his friends who are aged between 18 and 30 and that all our friends who are nearer our age are making him feel old.
   He is now wantng to change his hair style and the way he dresses so he feels younger, and after a short separation, has agreed to return to the marital home on the

condition that he can still see his new friends and behave in this new way!!
I am still very fond of him and the children desparately want him back, but do you think this is a passing thing that I should help him through or is this the new him, and will I have to put up with it for ever?
I am nearly 40 and loved my life before we separated, and am basically annoyed that all of a sudden he wants more from his life than his family can give him.
Is this a normal thing to happen to a fortysomething or should I let him go to start a new life for himself?
Post a Reply

- Re: Mid Life Crisis
  I believe mid life crisis is real and the effect can differ from male to male, however, what concerns me is that he thinks it is all about him. From your message it does not appear that he wants you to dress differently, or have your hair done differently or even encourage you to join him in the fun. The fact that you separated over this is a great concern indeed. The condition that he gave on coming home...well..what about your conditions! why dont you do what he is doing? join him on the nights out, see what he finds so interesting, who knows you may enjoy it too and be a boost to your marriage for both of you. But for him to be leading a different social life, with different friends, without involving them with you, sounds like he is living with his Mum. Is this what you want?, I doubt it. Men do some crazy things, but this one could jeopardize your marriage. Try to get involved and find out what this is all about and think about what you want for a change.
  Post a Reply
- Re: Mid Life Crisis
  The first thing that you need to ask yourself is whether you still love him or not, as you only say that you are fond of him. It sounds as though he has made his mind up of where his life wants to go and you don't seem to be included. If you do still love him then you should try to make it work, but if you don't then I think it's time to call it a day.
  Post a Reply
  - Re: Re: Mid Life Crisis
    You know, I can't work out whether I am being very brave or very stupid having him back.
    Yes I suppose I do still love him in a way but certainly not the kind of love I had for him a few years ago. My main reasons for wanting him to come back are for the children and for financial reasons. My main concern at the moment is the children who desperately miss their father, and if it means me having to cope with him through this Mid Life crisis (which you say does exist)for a year or so to keep my children secure and happy then I will do it.
    "Love" to me now is a very airy-fairy word which doesn't mean alot in my life at the moment, where my childrens happiness is most important. My husband and I very rarely argued but were quietly unhappy. And if anyone else says that children are resilient, I will scream!! Someone just made that up to make themselves feel less guilty about screwing with their childrens lives!!I have tried to make their lives as happy and fun as possible since their dad left but they still miss him terribly.
    I know you say that I should think about what I want, but I am not a selfish person and my childrens happiness comes first

I don't think my husband would want me to go out with him and his friends - it's just all men as far as I can gather,We had our own set of friends before but he doesn't want to go out with them anymore as they are too old!!(ie about our age)
I don't think that I could put the children through us separating again, but is there anyone out there who has been through what I am going through, who can give me some words of encouragement?
PS. I'll try not to sent this twice this time!!
Post a Reply

- Re: Re: Re: Mid Life Crisis
  Well I'll address this from a male perspective.

  I viewed the approach of my 40th birthday with absolute horror. All talk of life beginning at 40 was for me rubbish, as far as I am concerned I have lived 2 thirds of my useful life and the thought horrifies me. Men feel this far more acutely than women, as women can hide a lot of the ageing process ie dying hair etc. For men to do this is considered to be vain and slightly funny in our society.

  I think that all marriages become stale and what is wrong with putting some exitement back into life. At the end of the day this is all that we have it is not a rehearsal we never get a second chance. My philosophy is live life to the full and if this involves forming new friends or relationships then so be it. It is ridiculous to me to expect that two people in a marriage can fulfill all each others emotional needs. Loosen up and get a new life for yourself get new friends form new relationships and above all give each other the room to breathe. To talk of splitting up over this is entirely the wrong approach.

  My wife gives me as much freedom as I want I can do anything I please and more importantly so can she. I would never wish to put any restraints whatsoever upon her, as I always say "It is your life just because we are married doesn't mean that I own you". This works fine for us and we are both fulfilled and happy.

  Do not feel threatened by your husband wanting to recapture his youth. Go for it yourself and you never know you may both be the happier for it.
  Post a Reply

10. OPINIONS FROM MEN WANTED
    My boyfriend is [age] and I am [age]. We met 3 years ago and both of us had failed marriages between us and 4 children between us from the past marriages. From day 1, he has been absolutely head over heels for me, totally loving and romantic, all over me. He is still the same.

    So WHY does he look at pretty women all the time? If a pretty woman walks past

he can't keep his eyes off of her. When we're in the pub together he ogles the pretty women. I am attractive and get chatted up a lot (even when my boyfriend's around) and he takes it as a compliment that he's obviously got such a gorgeous girlfriend (his words by the way - I'm not that vain!). So if he's totally besotted with me, WHY WHY WHY does he ogle other women?

Post a Reply

- Re: OPINIONS FROM MEN WANTED
  Sorry - I am only a woman - but my thought when I read your message was "Don't you [name] look at other men?" i do, and i am very happily married.
  Post a Reply
  - Re: Re: OPINIONS FROM MEN WANTED
    This is something some men can't help but do, and some men don't. As my fiancee's mother told her, "it's all right for him to get an appetite elsewhere just so long as he eats at home". Don't worry about it, it's just for the same reason that advertisers keep using "attractive" models and sex to sell everything from clothes to cars, at the end of the day he's chosen you as the best of all the women he's ever seen/met, so be secure in that knowledge and don't expect him to suddenly become a eunuch because he can't! He's just being a healthy male!
    Post a Reply

11. What do blokes really think about one night stands?
    Any guys out there want to give me your views on this.

    The guys I meet at clubs seem only interested in one thing. Am I meeting the wrong men or is it now the norm to sleep with someone on the first night?

    PS I'm [age].
    Post a Reply

- Re: What do blokes really think about one night stands?
  Not its not the norm. Many of my mates are all looking for it, but won't admit that what they really want is a relationship. whilst they are looking and a one night stand comes along, who would refuse! When I had a few pints with my close friend, we both agreed that a lot of women think that if they sleep with a guy first night, or even second, the woman thinks she is buying into some committment..which is far from the truth. It is rare to meet someone in a nightclub and expect to start a relationship, much better to widen your circle of friends and social activities we have found. We both go the the gym and go out on loads of events, we have met some really great girls and had a great time, which has led to me meeting some of them later just for nights out, ok they have not developed into anything more (yet) but there are a lot of members at the gym and you never know. Lighten up and bit, dont do anything you might regret later or get yourself a reputation for and get out a bit more other than nightclubs.
  Post a Reply
  - Re: Re: What do blokes really think about one night stands?
    Well [name], what a great guy you appear to be.I am an older (much older) woman and out of the game but I can appreciate that men want committment ('scuse the spelling, I'm sure it is wrong) as much as women. The first priority has always been friendship and build on that.

In my day it was easier, no sex until you were married, but now things are a bit more confused. Women have equality and power but they are still women, and still need to feel treasured and valued, but perhaps the next woman is giving out more than them!!!
It is also hard for men, not knowing what their role is exactly. I think your advice is spot on, don't rely on nightclubs to meet people and make friends.
As a man in the year 200 you have my sympathy.
Post a Reply

- Re: Re: Re: What do blokes really think about one night stands?
  Thank you [names] for your comments.

  My problem is going to the right places to meet the right people. I think guys in clubs are only looking for one thing and when they find out that I don't 'put out' they're not interested.

  Maybe it was easier when sex was after marriage it just seems to be no big deal these days. Last time I was on the dating scene was quite a while ago (I'm divorced, 2 kids, married at 18, big mistake but another story)

  So any suggestions on where to meet people? I'm unlikely to meet anyone at work (small company) and I'm not really into the gym, lonely hearts screams desparation. Oh I took eveing classes last year - Advanced French with a bunch of middle aged but very nice poeple and all my friends are in couples. People have said to me if you stop looking you'll find someone but I really don't think that happens. I do sound like a desparate person now, but honestly I'm not. So much for lightening up a bit!! Maybe I should overcome my fear of fat sweaty bodies (mine!) and try the local gym afterall! You never know [name] I meet see you in there.
  Post a Reply

- Re: What do blokes really think about one night stands?
  What is wrong or right is a matter for you.
  My view, as a man, is that I would not expect a woman to do anything she thought was not right.
  Why don't women like you ever meet men like me who simply want a woman to love?
  A one night stand is the last thing I want.
  Post a Reply

Appendix 6: Discussion Board Rules

The discussion board rules are presented below as they appear on the website:

'RULES OF THE DISCUSSION BOARDS

1. Commercial messages and messages from businesses or organisations are not permitted. These boards are for women to talk to women – they are not to be used as a medium for marketing or selling to our users.
2. We encourage a healthy exchange of opinions and disagreements are allowed! By all means challenge an opinion – but please do it respectfully. Name calling, insults and foul and abusive language will not be tolerated.
3. Be sure you want to give information which is personal before you post a message. Remember that anybody can read it.
4. Do not post messages more than once. Duplicate messages are very frustrating.
5. We reserve the right to remove any message from the discussion boards.

Entering our discussion boards will be taken as acceptance of these rules.

ANY CONTRAVENTIONS WILL LEAD TO REMOVAL OF MESSAGE.

Should you come across any messages breaking these rules, please let us know.'

Appendix 7: 'Reconstructing Gender at University: Men as Victims' (co-published Paper)

Gough, B. and Peace, P. (2000) 'Reconstructing gender at university: men as victims', *Gender and Education.* 12(3): 385-98

Reconstructing Gender at University: Men as Victims

Abstract

The present study aims to contribute to recent developments in feminist and social constructionist work in the arena of masculinities in higher education by examining the talk within three all-male psychology student discussion groups. One of the authors (PP) facilitated the sessions by maintaining a broad focus on gender-related issues and the conversations were subsequently transcribed and subjected to a discourse analysis. The men's talk, although complex and often contradictory, functioned largely to present contemporary gender relations as empowering for women and disempowering for men. To this end the main discursive strategies are highlighted and ideological import of the men's talk is discussed. In particular, it is argued that such talk continues to reproduce inequality through stereotypical presentations of men and women (even when those very discourses are criticised by the men) and precludes change of the present status quo through claims that women are already in a favourable position in terms of education and employment.

Introduction

With a few notable exceptions, the study of masculinities in education has concentrated on school-based interactions (see Weiner, 1994). These studies have proved valuable in documenting gendered subcultures and the reproduction of hierarchies between boys and between boys and girls within schools (e.g. Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Epstein, 1997). In the university environment, there have been some studies looking at language use (e.g. Berrill, 1991; Fisher, 1996) but without an explicit focus on gender (see Stokoe, 1997). Consequently, the present paper builds on existing work by examining the discourse/s presented by male university psychology students on the subject of gender, with particular regard to the construction of masculinities. The focus is on group discussions arranged outside of the formal curriculum, with a view to exploring how talk about gender is structured by educational and wider cultural discourses.

We are especially interested in the men's perceptions of women and feminism in the light of recent debates about the 'crisis in masculinity' (see Edley and Wetherell, 1997), signalled within education by the current preoccupation with 'underachieving boys' (see Raphael-Reed, 1999). Indeed, moves to rehabilitate men and traditional masculinities, principally from white middle class sources, can be linked to a 'backlash' against a cultural climate often perceived as 'profeminist', 'politically correct' or even emasculating (see Faludi, 1992; Messner, 1997). There have been claims that women/feminism have 'gone too far' (see Dennis, 1992) and that men have 'lost out' in the gender 'war' (Farrell, 1994). This particular reading of contemporary gender politics

has prompted many privileged men to 'rediscover' their essential 'deep masculine' identity through studying relevant myths and legends (Bly, 1990). Others retreat to traditional male-centred activities such as pub drinking, and playing and watching sport (Morgan, 1992). Even unemployed men continue to position themselves within a traditional 'male breadwinner' discourse by doing illegal work rather than taking the opportunity to do more childcare or domestic tasks (Willott and Griffin, 1997).

The appeal of conventional masculine ideals within educational settings has also been widely documented. For example, Edley and Wetherell (1997) carried out small group interviews with male students to examine discursive strategies employed in constructing masculine identities in a single-sex school. Drawing on post-structuralist theory, this study concentrated on the 'othering' of alternative male identities by the students in order to elevate traditional identities. For example, the 'new man' identity, though used by some students as a strategy of resistance, was generally othered by those lads who identified with the values embodied within traditional discourses around masculinity, such as sport and aggression.

In another study, Wright (1996) looked at how masculine and feminine subjectivities were constructed in opposition in and through regulation and disciplining of the body in secondary school physical education in Australia. Analysis of interviews with both students and teachers highlighted the way in which the male body was seen as the norm from which female bodies are measured in comparison. Females were not only seen as essentially biologically different from males, but also *lacking* in areas that accrue cultural value and power, such as strength and activity. As with the Edley and Wetherell (1997) study, resistances to hegemonic positionings were evident. However, these were subsumed within more powerful discourses depicting males as strong, tough and independent, and females as fragile, vulnerable, nurturant, dependent and physically inferior.

These studies are invaluable in highlighting the importance of language in the construction of gender differentiation in schools and colleges. However, little research appears to have been conducted on the social construction of gender in higher education. Of the few studies carried out in the university context, Gough's (1998) examination of the discursive reproduction of sexism through all-male group discussions is of particular relevance here. Although the psychology undergraduates were presented with feminist and critical social psychological approaches to gender relations on the course, the men were found to utilise repertoires of 'socialisation', 'biology', and 'psychology of women' to explain and excuse gender difference. Paradoxically, the exposition of egalitarian values was also found to be a key site for 'new sexist' talk, whereby the speaker's would profess tolerance to soften subsequent statements which could easily be heard as prejudiced (as in 'I'm all for equality, but...women should not fly planes..' etc.) (see also Gill, 1993).

The present paper builds on such research by exploring how male university students orient themselves to contemporary gender politics. As with much contemporary research, a feminist social constructionist analysis is favoured in order to assess the ideological implications of present(-ed) talk. Within 'the new men's studies' there has been movement away from structuralist and essentialist theories of masculinity ('categorical theories' - Connell, 1987) and toward a post-structuralist perspective (e.g., Henwood, 1998; Davies, 1997; Martino, 1995). The concept of

'hegemonic masculinity' has become increasingly popular (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, 1985). Here, the focus is shifted away from men as a homogeneous group towards a conception of men as reproducing, reworking and resisting multiple and conflicting forms of masculinity. There is an emphasis on power relations, with men seen as positioned in various ways in relation to each other (and women) within discourses of gender, class, sexuality, race and so on. For example, the 'feminine' and the homosexual tend to be defined as subordinate within hegemonic masculinities, a practice which may enable heterosexual men to claim socially valued 'masculine' attributes (strength, rationality etc.). So, rather than construing masculinity as an essential quality that men possess, 'masculinities' are reconfigured as something men 'do' (Morgan, 1992). In this vein there has been much feminist social constructionist/ post-structuralist work theorising masculinity (Wetherell and Griffin, 1991) and an increasing emphasis on empirical work focussing on mundane talk (e.g. Gough, 1998).

The Study

Context

Briefly, the main aim of the research was to explore issues around masculine identities by examining men's talk in various settings with a view to studying the implications for gender relations. We have been influenced by critical and feminist work in this area (e.g. Connell, 1995; Raphael-Reed, 1999) and hope to locate ourselves within these traditions as we wished to highlight and problematise discourses/practices around masculinity which were used to subordinate 'others' such as women and gay men. Of course there are issues around the legitimacy of construing as pro-feminist work which involves men studying men (see Porter, 1992; Wetherell and Griffin, 1991; Clatterbaugh, 1990). In the area of masculinities and education specifically, Skelton (1998) has pointed to ostensibly pro-feminist research by men which, upon scrutiny, fails to adhere to feminist principles around highlighting and challenging power relations and the oppression of women. Although there are difficulties around men appropriating a feminist label, we would follow Boone (1992) in encouraging men to actively participate in feminist projects whereby gender is critically and reflexively interrogated, mindful of the limits imposed by conventional 'masculine' norms from which all men benefit. In other words, we must be careful to document - and resist - interview dynamics and particular discourses which bear on an all-male research context.

The participants were third year undergraduate psychology students studying at a Yorkshire university and will have been familiar with psychological perspectives on gender, including feminist approaches. It would also be expected that middle class liberal values which pervade university education in general and the discipline of psychology in particular might focus student attention on *individual* attainment, rights and responsibilities more than differences and inequalities between groups (see e.g. Stainton-Rogers et al., 1995). It is also worth noting that the male students on the psychology degree were 'outnumbered' by females by a ratio of four to one, a situation in which one might anticipate some claims about men's' minority status and vulnerability.

The prospective participants were asked informally if they would be willing to take part in a recorded discussion on gender equality/inequality - it was felt that presenting

them with a topic such as 'men and masculinity' might appear to require personal disclosure and thus a refusal to volunteer. All those approached were comfortable with the topic of gender equality/inequality and were happy to take part. The male students were not asked about their sexuality, but their talk would appear to locate them as heterosexual. The age range was between twenty-one and thirty-one and most (except Marcus) professed working class backgrounds, although middle class university culture may problematise this identity. All participants were born in England and one participant (Amin) described himself as coming from an Indo-Pakistani background.

At this juncture we should note those positions we as researchers share with the participants: young(ish), white, male, heterosexual and probably middle class. Despite this common ground, however, it would be facile to assume common interests, since we as researchers were primarily interested in deconstructing and critiquing participants' discourse. As well, of course, and despite best intentions to the contrary, institutional and disciplinary structures work to produce researchers as knowledgeable and authoritative and participants as relatively naive and powerless. Such a complexity of identities and relationships must inform any reading of the analysis which follows.

Three group discussions were conducted, lasting between sixty and seventy-five minutes. Each discussion involved four men including one of the authors (PP). The discussions took place in different university seminar rooms. All rooms were quiet and conducive to the intimacy of a small group discussion. The researcher and participants arranged themselves in a close but comfortable circle, with no furniture between them. A tape recorder was placed outside the circle. The discussions were unstructured in an attempt to keep the conversation as much like everyday conversation as possible. Whilst the interviewer did not bring along a 'shopping list' of detailed questions or an interview schedule, he did take a broad outline of topics which was referred to when conversation dried up or became too far removed from the area of interest. The topics included employment, education (including university life), relationships, marriage, sport, advertising, pornography, and feminism. The interviewer did not refer to this outline very often as conversation tended to be enthusiastic and often covered these areas without prompting. The three group discussions were transcribed in full; all names are pseudonyms.

Discourse Analysis

The present study then aims to look at the 'practical ideologies' (Wetherell, Stiven, and Potter, 1987) which men draw upon in the company of other males and the social functions fulfilled by them. Practical ideologies are defined as 'the often contradictory and fragmentary complexes of notions, norms, and models which guide conduct and allow for it's justification and rationalisation.' (ibid: 60). There is a concern to interpret discourse as deriving from and reproducing (or resisting) culturally shared or dominant assumptions regarding gender. This 'top-down' approach emphasises the structuring of talk by prevailing 'discourses' (Parker, 1992) or 'interpretative repertoires' (Wetherell and Potter, 1992) and concentrates on issues pertaining to power, ideology and subjectification. The terms 'discourse' or 'interpretative repertoire' are fairly interchangeable (although see Burr, 1995 for a clear discussion of differences and debates) and refer to sets of statements or images which converge on a particular meaning. A good example would be that which we are highlighting in this paper - 'men

as victims' - where we examine the ways in which men are constructed as vulnerable and discuss the implications which follow for gender relations.

As well, however, and in line with recent attempts at integrated approaches to discourse (see Willott and Griffin, 1997; Wetherell, 1998), language is studied in relation to the more immediate discursive context, that is, in terms of what it achieves for the user (rather than as a window to internal cognitions, or a neutral representation of some external reality) - a 'bottom-up' approach. The emphasis here is on the action orientation of talk, on the rhetorical devices and manoeuvres used by speakers to accomplish specific tasks, such as offering justifications and excuses, apportioning blame, making accusations and generally presenting self in an acceptable moral light (see Edwards and Potter, 1992). The work of Billig (1988) has also been influential here with its complimentary focus on the dilemmatic aspects of language - the way in which the speaker or writer aims to argue their case in such a way as to present it as the justifiable truth and simultaneously (though often implicitly) deny alternative or competing versions. So, whilst 'top-down' approaches concentrate on how people are positioned within discourse/s, 'bottom-up' analyses underline people's agency in conversation. Both traditions are drawn upon in the analysis below, in the spirit of eclecticism advocated in recent papers (see Willott and Griffin, 1997; Wetherell, 1998).

A popular (though not inherent) use of discourse analysis is to examine the accounts members of dominant groups give to justify, legitimise, naturalise, normalise, and excuse power and privilege and to present social change as unnatural, impossible or undesirable (see Wetherell et al., 1987). These considerations are important with regard to how the men talk about gender and negotiate masculine identities. As with any discourse analysis, the transcripts were initially read closely and repeatedly and key themes identified. Of the many identified, the 'men-as victims' theme was recurrent across the three transcripts. The next step was to document the various ways in which this theme was presented and which functions it served in the conversation and in terms of wider cultural implications. Contradiction and coherence were noted at each stage. In practice, this process is more cyclic and creative than linear (see Willott and Griffin [1997] for a full account of a discourse analytic process).

Men as victims

The men's talk was contradictory, sometimes acknowledging women as oppressed but giving special attention to how they are generally relatively powerful compared to men. As well, there was some recognition of male domination but a greater focus on how men are relatively *dis*empowered. Feminism is portrayed as extreme and oppressive to men and it is men who are presented as the victims of sexual objectification in the media and sexual harassment at work. Further, the view that men have become feminised is articulated, with examples given where men are ridiculed for lack of muscle and presented as overly preoccupied with image. These themes are substantiated below.

Masculinity as Stressful

The argument that men 'suffer' more than women was commonly voiced, as in the following extract where the speaker argues that masculinity is, in fact, detrimental to men's health:

Interviewer: Is this a man's world?

Philip: [*sings*] It's a man's, man's [*laughs*]. [...] Wow, that is really hard, I mean it's a really, erm, shit, it's like women have got a lot of power but it's not spoken about. Yeah, erm, it's like, you know, you get your feminist people that speak, like, you know, 'this area's unfair to women, we want that, we want that, we want that', but I think the areas where women are in a better position just seem to be gettin' neglected. And after all, it's like, in modern theories about man - he's sort of like genetically sort of predisposed to sort of live longer than women, but it's shorter, basically they're having shorter lives, so surely a man must be like, must have a poorer quality of life 'cus of the stress factor. The stress factor is killin' 'em!

(Extract 1, Group 2)*

Philip sees masculinity in the 1990s as characterised by a loss of status and power. It is *men* not women who are the victims of contemporary gender relations, a 'fact' which is 'not spoken about', 'neglected'. Feminists are constructed as biased, selectively concentrating on areas where women are treated unfairly and ignoring the areas where they are in a better position than men. To support his argument, he makes a vague reference to 'modern theories', as if to imply that his position is not personal but grounded in the authority of academic thinking. Which is then situated within biology ('genetics'), suggesting that men are naturally predisposed to live longer than women. As Gough (1998) notes, repertoires of biology are commonly invoked by men as a way of author(is)ing gender difference as fixed and 'naturally' correct. In this instance, the biological discourse sets up a foundation for Phillip from which his subsequent statement about men dying younger than women may achieve maximum impact - it is against nature. But the explanation offered for premature male decay is situated within the social ('stress'), presumably related to the roles and responsibilities of the modern male.

For Philip then, the health costs of masculinity are being ignored by feminists who are selectively seeking evidence of areas where women are disadvantaged. It could be argued that the male health warning may function to discourage women from straying too far into 'masculine' domains. Philip could be seen as deploying a 'male-as-protector' discourse, shielding women from the stress that *even* men cannot cope with. Gill (1993) documented a similar 'women would not *really* want to change their position' form of accounting by male radio broadcasters who, for example, claimed the lack of women in broadcasting was due to women being disinterested in technology. Elsewhere in the same group discussion, Philip continues the 'poor male' theme, but this time his talk is highly contradictory:

Philip: A woman's, er, if a man shows weakness it's like a massive loss of status, with women it's pathetic or [**Amin** *laughs*] so that's what I was thinking, yeah, [**Amin:** Exactly, yeah] more women'll want to sort of go out and stuff, but like, if it happens to a woman she's, er, her vulnerability is part of her femininity - it's makes her more attract.. - she can blend it into that and make her more appealing and it's like, erm, so there are equivalent examples of the other side. [...]

(Extract 2, Group 2)

Here, Philip argues that men are disadvantaged because they do not have 'feminine' excuses to fall back on. Femininity is characterised by being pathetic and vulnerable, attributes regarded not only as acceptable, but also as at times useful and attractive.

Conversely, for a man to display such 'unmasculine' weakness would be to suffer a massive loss of status. There are a number of ideological implications of this talk. First, the talk fits in with a number of pervasive binary oppositions that maintain gender difference and inequalities in place (men as rational, strong, defined by status, etc./ women as emotional, weak, defined by appearance..). Second, whilst such traditional gendered talk remains unchallenged, it is not employed with the usual accompaniment of pride or celebration of men's position of dominance. On the contrary, conventional gender ideals are used as evidence that it is *women* who get a better deal in society. The talk is contradictory since the 'stereotypes' are taken for granted as real whilst being simultaneously criticised for their constraining influence on men.

Feminist Oppression

Across the transcripts, feminism is almost universally presented as dangerous and alienating to men. In the next extract, for example, feminism is portrayed as power-hungry and disinterested in equality in response to a hypothetical question concerning men surrendering their masculinity:

Ken: Keep it as a man's world. We give women a job, like Prime Minister, look what happens to the country! [*laughs*]

Julian: Yeah, yeah, I think it's still a man's world. I think the, er, the kind of onus on power is, in general, still rests largely in the male domain.

Tony: But I don't, I don't, I mean, saying that it's a man's world, I don't think it'll ever change to being a sort of an equal world. Erm, because, let's face it, if, you've got feminists, feminist extremists, they're not after equality as such as they're after the power; they're after dominance rather than, you know, an equal share, equal rights. And, we've also already proved that with things like Communism that equality's not gonna work; it's an ideal. It's never, never gonna work. So, all you're gonna get is, you're gonna get one, either males dominant or females dominant, whichever.

(Extract 3, Group 1)

Ken jests that it is undesirable for women to be in power, using Margaret Thatcher as an example - no account of Conservative Party policies, conditions beyond her immediate control or the male-dominated cabinet is offered. The focus is uncomplicatedly cast on her gender. Julian lays aside Ken's 'humour' and expresses his view that men are in a relatively powerful position. It is interesting that he uses the word 'domain', highlighting the distinctness of the 'man's world' and it's exclusivity.

Tony is torn between expressing two rather different arguments. He begins to say that this is not a 'man's world', but quickly settles for the argument that it is, but the only other option is for women to be in a position of power. Tony's either/or view that power and dominance will always rest with either men or women precludes change since either scenario would be equally unacceptable. To strengthen his argument he uses two 'supporting' examples. Firstly, he invites us to 'face it' that 'feminist *extremists*' are seeking power and dominance rather than equality. Different feminisms are not seen as having different ideas about how to implement change toward a common goal so much as having different ideas about what relative share of power they desire. The failure of Communism is also uncomplicatedly marshalled as evidence that equality is an ideal that will never work. This was not challenged or developed by the other men, being accepted as a routine point of closure.

In another discussion, concrete examples in support of 'biased' pro-women policies are offered:

Marcus: I mean, look at what we've got here: we have women's only rooms within the university, we have women's officers, a women's-only minibus and, yeah it is incredibly biased, I mean, there's no equality in that at all. I'm not saying some of the ideals they're trying to promote are wrong. I mean, if women want an area where they can get away from some men making immature smutty remarks, then fine, yeah, they should be able to have that but I find the whole thing very, it's like, there's a big conspiracy plot, you know, when you're thirteen or fourteen you're taken aside at school, they'll say, "Right we'll have all the men in the gym and this is how your gonna treat women but don't let 'em find out about this", you know.

(Extract 4, Group 2)

According to Marcus, attempts at promoting equality in the university have alienated men who do not receive such favourable treatment. Although he acknowledges the need for certain measures to protect women from other, sexist men on campus, thereby establishing himself as tolerant or liberal, he proceeds to impute an irrational paranoia to those who devise and implement women-centred policies. The 'conspiracy' that all boys are educated to oppress women presents a vivid commonplace metaphor which facilitates subsequent critique - it is after all, commonly accepted as a ridiculous scenario. The homogenisation of men implied thereof unfairly judges non-sexist men like himself such that the policy of protecting and empowering women can be called into question.

Sexism Against Men

In other places, men are more explicitly presented as the victims of sexism:

Geoff: There's some adverts are well judged and some others that are crap, but you find that there's less sexist stuff now with women. I think it's goin' the other way against, sex-sexist stuff with *men.* Men are being used more as, er sexual objects in advertisements, you know, semi-clothed men and all this kind of stuff. Most disturbing.

(Extract 5, Group 3)

Geoff finds it 'most disturbing' that the tradition of presenting women as sex objects in advertising is allegedly being reversed - men, it is claimed, now endure more experiences of sexism than women. The victims of sexism turn out to be those traditionally accused of perpetuating it - men. This strategy of denying prejudice and projecting it on to marginalized and oppressed groups has also been documented by Billig (1988) in the context of racism and Gill (1993) in relation to sexism.

A similar account is deployed in the context of employment, where men are said to be the target of sexual harassment:

Geoff: Yeah. The worst thing I've ever encountered was being introduced to an all female office environment. That was bloody terrible.

Steven: I became sex object at this place.

Geoff: No I weren't sex object but they hated me guts. They got rid of me the swines. They were makin' everythin' go wrong deliberately. So women can be just as bad as men. They were jealous because I

were gonna be employed to sort of get promoted in the hierarchy a lot quicker than them - they didn't like that. Not my bloody fault - that were the boss. He should have seen it comin' but he was a *twat*, so.

Interviewer: (looking at Steven) You say you became sex object.

Steven: It's like er, they-they-they, the group harass you. I mean, it's all friendly stuff (**Shaun:** *Interrupts*)

Shaun: You don't know what to do though do you? It's embarrassing.

Steven: It's not that, they don't do it for a few weeks until you're comfortable with it and you know what to expect. There's nothing wrong about it, nothing threatening at all...
which is probably what it would have been the other way round.

Geoff: Yeah. [..] This is it. Men are assumed to be more threatening.

Steven: Well, they are.

(Extract 6, Group 3)

Geoff's and Steven's talk presents a challenge to the usual view of sexism in the workplace. Geoff claims that whilst he was not sexually harassed, the women were keen to take every opportunity to make 'everythin' go wrong deliberately'. He feels he was constantly undermined - a common complaint from women working in male-dominated work. He labels the women as 'swines', with all the associations that brings with it: dirty, greedy, smelly, uncontrollable, animal, to-be-slaughtered, and so on. The proverb about stubbornness: "Swine, women and bees cannot be turned" shows a history of likening women and swine. It is interesting that whilst Geoff does not present himself as having been treated as a sex object, he does not shirk from objectifying women. Lees (1993) highlights a number of terms used by men to treat women as objects and deny them their human status, including seeing them as animals: 'dog', 'cow', 'pussy', 'bitch', etc - 'swine' would seem to fit comfortably within this discourse.

Whilst Geoff presents the women as uncontrollable animals, they obviously have a great deal of agency and power since they made 'everythin' go wrong'. Further, they are furnished with reasonable motivation, namely, that they were upset that he was earmarked for fast-track promotion, probably because he is male. His boss is criticised for not seeing the problem before it got out of hand - not for failure to treat people equally. Furthermore, the boss also becomes less than human like the 'swines' he works with. The boss is feminised ('twat'), presumably for his lack of rationality, reason, control, foresight, etc. Geoff therefore presents himself as 'oppressed' by gender as well as class/status in the workplace.

Steven presents a quite different experience of the workplace - he feels he 'became a sex object'. This reverses our usual expectations of relations in the workplace. Most of his talk is centred around making light of this: 'it's all friendly stuff', '[t]here's nothing wrong about it, nothing threatening at all'. To see harassment as a threat may be perceived by him as emotional and unreasonable, and therefore feminine. He also claims that men are more threatening than women, perhaps another reason for 'taking it like a man'. His talk could also be seen as making a claim about how women are overly concerned with harassment - '[t]here's nothing wrong about it, nothing threatening at all but, which is probably what it would have been the other way round'. Themes of

embarrassment, confusion and victimisation emerge in relation to men's experiences at work, with women presented as powerful and at times abusive in this context. Such reported loss of status by men can amount to a form of feminisation or emasculation, as the next extracts indicate.

The Lamented Feminisation of Men

The world of advertising provided a range of material from which the speakers elaborated a story of male castration:

Interviewer: What about advertisin' - the way men and women are portrayed in advertisin' - any thoughts on that?

Shaun: What stereotypes and things like that?

Geoff: These days (**Shaun:** Mr. Muscle!) yeah, I don't like that one, it annoys me something rotten.

Steven: There's always adverts as well that make women, that women are making men look stupid

Geoff: Yeah, they're not exactly improving women's er, you know, appearance, they're just making men look cretins so they look better in comparison. What's the point in that?

Shaun: Yeah, I mean, it's exactly the opposite of what used to happen.

(Extract 7, Group 3)

Shaun brings up the example of the 'Mr. Muscle' advertisement (a household cleaning agent) where the advertisers draw on competing, contradictory discourses. The man is ironically 'lacking' in muscle structure to show that it is the product that does the hard work. But whilst in one sense the advertisement challenges the usual 'stereotypical' macho man it reproduces this discourse through the product name *Mr.* Muscle. The advertisement claims the product "Loves the jobs you hate", perhaps reproducing the idea that domestic work is particularly disliked by men, with women as the experts in the field. Geoff is clearly annoyed by the advert, though not for these reasons. Steven's subsequent claim that 'women are making men look stupid' in advertisements is followed by Geoff's explanation of why he is so irritated by this type of presentation. He argues that they are a devious attempt by women to disempower, ridicule, and demean men in order to set up a new, more favourable baseline for comparison. Shaun comments, somewhat nostalgically perhaps, on how this is 'exactly the opposite of what used to happen'.

This theme of the relative disempowerment of men in media advertising is echoed in group 1 too, where men are seen to be embracing the feminine with excessive vigour:

Interviewer: Er, I was just thinking about media imagery and how men and women are portrayed in the media - advertising.

Ken: Yeah this is where blokes don't have the power 'cus you look at a super-model who's female she can be on ten grand a week, a second or whatever -something really daft, I mean, they're on about ten grand a *day*, these top models, and the super-model who's a bloke who's, you know, the same status is on about two. But then again, it's a bit, because what it represents (**Tony:** *interrupts*)

Tony: We were saying that today in the lecture about the adverts and the images that used to be the male images [*corrects*] female image, and now you've got a traditional sport, football, and you've got a man that's advertising shampoo in his footballing (**Julian:** Oh, yeah) kit, pushes the hair back and, "I am a footballer" (*laughs*) and then you've got this very sort of, this stance is sort of very feminine sort of flick the hair back, long hair, flowing locks, as he kicks a ball around the pitch.

(Extract 8, Group 1)

Here, the example of modelling is used to invert the argument that men are in a position of power due to their greater earning potential. Ken seems unsure of average earnings, claiming at different points that female models earn ten thousand pounds a week, day, or second, and male models *about* two thousand a day. Still, his point is that the pay differential disempowers men and empowers women. Whilst women are often seen as subordinated by being valued for their appearance, this is seen here as positively empowering. Ken begins to recognise this but is interrupted by Tony.

Tony argues that the traditionally 'masculine' sport of football is being feminised through advertising. It is *men* who are now concerning themselves with their appearance. There also seems to be concern that men who are worried about their appearance are doing it on feminine terms: 'flick the hair back, long hair, flowing locks', and this is incongruous with masculine sport: 'as he kicks a ball around the pitch'. The argument seems to be that male models are being (ab)used. Bringing together the discursive labour of Ken and Tony, male models are disempowered through poor pay and feminisation.

Conclusions

The men's talk involves complex, fragmented, and multiple ways of accounting utilising the 'male-as-*dis*/empowered'/ 'female-as-dis/*empowered*' repertoire which functions to preserve gender inequality by re-presenting men as *already* disempowered relative to women, and therefore, by implication, subject to more unacceptable disempowerment should further change occur. This 'male as victims' discourse can be added to the range of rhetorics of masculinity documented in existing research, such as expressing egalitarian credentials before launching into prejudiced talk (Gough, 1998), claiming that women would not *really* want to change their position (Gill, 1993), and arguing that men should seek to preserve or 'rediscover' traditional identities eroded by social change (Bly, 1990).

Presenting men as victims can be situated within the context of a wider political backlash against feminism (see Faludi, 1992; Messner, 1997), but the ways in which this discourse is articulated points to concerns about political correctness and a desire not to be perceived as prejudiced. As such, ways of accounting may be sought that continue to reproduce the privileges of masculinity whilst simultaneously limiting the space for potential accusations of sexism. To claim that men already suffer from present gender relations is a particularly powerful way of doing this. The men in the present study claimed variously that masculinity costs them in terms of their health, leads to feelings of victimisation and exclusion in terms of university, is the subject of ridicule and belittlement in media advertising, is the object of women's grievances and sexual advances in employment, and limits emotional expressiveness such as an inability to display weakness. The list of complaints covers many of the areas where

women are treated unequally and unfairly and where men are normally seen to prosper: health, media, education and employment.

Although aspects of traditional masculinities were critiqued, this did not provoke rejection or reinvention. If being 'masculine' is framed as a health risk, for example, then such a discourse invites one to question the point of holding on to the masculine ideal. Instead, alternative masculinities were presented as feminised and therefore unacceptable. As with Willott and Griffin's (1997) unemployed men, opportunities for refashioning masculine identities were not taken up - society, women and feminism were variously construed as problematic and in need of critical attention. This situation presents a dilemma for feminist researchers - should sexist and/or anti-feminist talk be challenged in the group discussions? In one respect we are interested in how the participants' make sense of gender in contemporary society and are perhaps obliged to respect their words as they are produced, with critical analysis reserved for the ensuing texts. Yet, a lot of this talk contributes to the subtle repackaging of patriarchy and as such might warrant the voicing of objections and the presentation of alternative perspectives from the feminist researcher during data collection, thereby attempting to heighten awareness and institute change.

Our own strategy in this case was non-interventionist, although this created a degree of discomfort for the interviewer when statements perceived as 'problematic' were aired. The charge of collusion could easily be made here of course, with participants possibly seeing the interviewer as a male ally, similar in background and accepting of the interpretations of gender presented. As Skelton (1998) notes, this is a particularly vexed situation where men are researching men as it is difficult to avoid aspects of communal 'bonding' and associated masculinist ideology, although we have explicitly attempted here to resist such practices and forge feminist-informed readings of the texts.

There were temptations to get critically involved in the debates, but it was felt that a disciplined stance would ensure that the data would largely reflect the participant's understandings negotiated between themselves. We are currently wrestling with this difficult issue, thinking about useful interventional strategies that would challenge participants sexist talk rather than implicitly encouraging it (as here with the interviewer nodding and being relatively passive). An issue here is the powerful position of the researcher in social science research, even when attempts are made to democratise the research encounter, for to impose one's 'authoritative' views on proceedings might be to exploit a privileged position. Careful attention must be paid to ensure participants do not feel constrained or threatened in the interview situation and that they feel able to challenge the researcher where appropriate.

The study must also be read in light of the specific higher educational context. Although the male students would have been exposed to sympathetic treatment of feminist/critical theories within the psychology curriculum, they chose to reject, simplify and caricature such approaches in order to reinforce arguments about male victimisation. This could be related in part to the men being 'outnumbered' (approximately 1:4) by women on the course, perhaps encouraging the fantasy of minority status - previous work with students on the same course found men lamenting a 'prowomen' or 'profeminist' agenda at university (see Gough, in press). Such perceptions would obviously undermine pedagogic attempts to teach and stimulate

informed debate on gender issues within the curriculum. Of course, feminism in general enjoys poor press in the 1990s, with many women dissociating themselves from the label whilst doing work or expressing opinions that could easily be classified as feminist (see e.g. Percy and Kremer, 1995). As with the notion of a 'classless society', the myth of a 'postfeminist' society continues to find favour within fragmented, individualistic consumer cultures - in such a climate where equality is believed to exist, men as well as women can be equally dis/empowered.

To conclude, the present study highlights the way in which men's dominance of women continues to be reproduced in the 1990s through subtle and complex ways of accounting. Utilising the men-as-*dis*/empowered / women-as-dis/*empowered* repertoire provides a powerful way of stalling change of the present status quo. The men present masculinity as feminised, objectified, excluded, marginalized and generally discriminated against. The bases on which women's appeal for equality and change are founded are claimed to be equally applicable to men. They are marshalled as a defensive barrier to protect masculinity from the purported sea change in power dynamics that threaten to delimit, debase, pervert, devalue, and erode it. Clearly more research on gender in higher education settings is required, but the notion of men as victims presents challenges to educationalists and critical researchers interested in highlighting gender inequalities and in pursuing social change.

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***Note 1**
In the interests of readability, notation was kept to a minimum:
[] = inaudible.
[.] = pause (number of dots provides a rough guide to length - more dots = longer pause).
[text] = probable content.
[**Name:** text] = Simultaneous talk.
[*text*] = Clarificatory information, e.g., interruptions, laughter.
text = speaker's original emphasis.

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