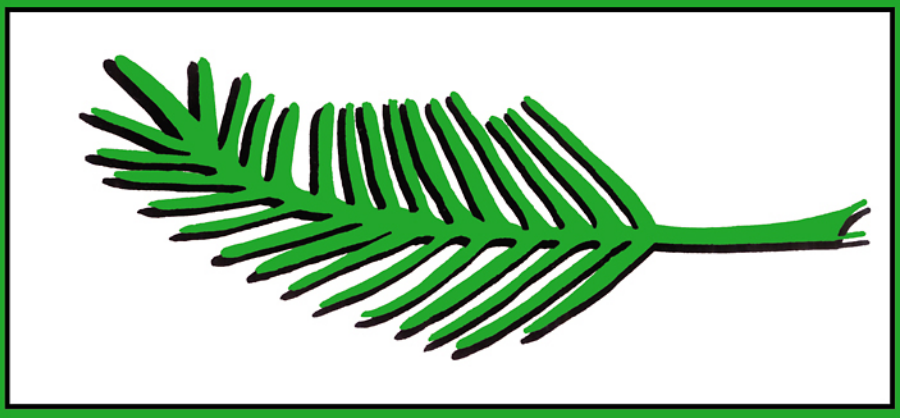
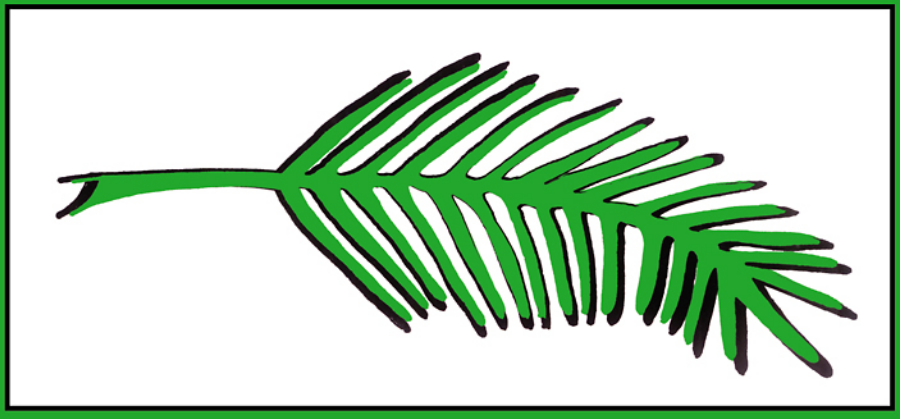


Communicating Gender



Suzanne Romaine

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Oxford University

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To some women friends with thanks for their support and friendship, and lots of interesting conversations!

Birgit
Dorothy
Fiona
Isabel
Karen
Leialoha
Mitzi
Nancy
Sherryll
Shinae
Tomi
Urmi

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Preface

This book is about how we communicate gender and why language and discourse play such important roles in the process. Because my own intellectual training lies primarily in linguistics, that has to some extent led me to look at gender primarily through the lens of language. However, I think a good case can independently be made for the centrality of language and communication to any discussion of gender, or for that matter virtually any discipline. If you accept my arguments that what we call "society," or even more grandly, "reality" itself, is largely constructed and represented to ourselves and others through language, then language and discourse are paramount. In the first chapter I explain why "doing" gender is a dynamic and inherently communicative process and why language is so fundamental to understanding our gendered selves.

Certainly another indication of the centrality of language is its frequent mention in the popular debate on sexual difference. This can be seen by picking up almost any contemporary magazine where articles on topics such as differences in male-female conversation, body language, advice on how women should speak in the workplace, and so on, have become increasingly frequent. Sociolinguist Deborah Tannen's book, which was a best seller for several years, dealt with problems in male-female communication.

The many popular articles and books now being published about the topic of cross-gender communication suggest that men and women are having a hard time communicating with one another. At home, women complain that their husbands do not really talk to them. Men complain that women talk constantly, but have nothing important to say. At work, men

say that women get intimidated and offended too easily. They do not speak up or they back down even when they have a good point. They tend to be more emotional and to personalize business matters. Women say that men leave them out of shop talk, and informal talk, where the "real" business gets done. The misunderstandings are often so severe that they give rise to the complaint that men and women do not even speak the same language. As Suzette Haden Elgin (1993) pointed out, this is the ultimate disclaimer. Here again, there is a wealth of material aimed at a popular audience. Bestselling author John Gray (1992) claimed that men and women are so different, they even behave as if they live on different planets: Men are from Mars and women, from Venus.

Language is key too in the campaign for language reform, where I show that the debate is really about issues of race, gender, class, or culture. To advocate deliberate change is to threaten the status quo, the prevailing moral order, and a particular view of the world. Whose values will prevail in public discourse? If "only" words were at stake, why is there so much resistance?

Because the gender and communication interface impacts across such a broad social, cultural, and political spectrum, I believe its study must be truly cross-disciplinary. In writing this book I have necessarily had to poach on the terrain of a great many other disciplines such as anthropology, biology, communication, education, economics, history, literary criticism, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. I was particularly concerned to bring a linguistic perspective to bear on central issues in feminist theories. I have learned a great deal by reading through the continually expanding literature on gender and sexuality, written primarily by feminist scholars over the past 25 years. Similarly, within the field of postcolonial studies, I have benefited from the work of Edward Said, which has led me to see more clearly how deeply embedded in racism and colonialism is the "master" narrative underlying the Western liberal humanist tradition.

Because modern linguistic theory is essentially a product of 19th-century European scholarship, some notions basic to linguistic analysis, such as the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and theories of markedness, are also embedded in this master narrative of masculinist science. Writing this book has been a fascinating, yet sometimes depressing, experience. Although I was well aware of the more obvious ways in which language has discriminated against women as well as how the discipline of linguistics has tended to marginalize the study of language and gender, I was at times surprised at how deeply ingrained such prejudice is in the intellectual discourses and metaphors of the Western and other traditions.

The limitations of this viewpoint lead me to reject essentialism and to adopt a rather broad definition of feminism that goes beyond the subject of women. An examination of bipolar categories such as *men* and *women* is necessary, but does not exhaust the issue. The categories are not the

ultimate loci of experience reducible to some essence, but represent changing subjectivities over time and space. In much of the linguistic research on language and gender linguists have looked for correlations between sets of people pre-grouped into male-female and other categories (such as social class, ethnicity, etc.) and features of language (e.g., vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.) as well as language use (e.g., politeness). This approach has limited explanatory power because it starts with the categories of male and female as fixed and stable givens rather than as varying constructs themselves in need of explanation. The standard sociolinguistic account of the relationship between language and society often seems to suggest, even if only implicitly, that language reflects already existing social identities rather than constructs them. There is a lot more to the study of language and gender than that.

As far as feminist theories are concerned, I believe the way forward in discussions of women's equality, and so forth, lies in moving away from sexual polarization. Here I align myself with scholars such as Sandra Bem (1993), Judith Butler (1990), and others who have taken a constructivist view of gender. Gender is above all dynamic and changes in response to cultural and historical forces. Gender is doing and not just being. Even though our culture treats the gender identities of male and female as if they were essentially real and stable components of personal identity, we are never passive victims of culture or history.

Finally, I am aware of the dilemma faced by many gender scholars of having their work dismissed as "unscientific" because it appears to have clear political implications and objectives. As one man wrote to the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (Feb. 18, 1994): "Gender studies, women's studies, feminist writers etc. are all faces of an essentially political agenda which should no longer be treated as a serious academic discipline." I accept the charge that those of us interested in gender issues have a political agenda. Feminism, however defined, is a political position. It would be lack of a political agenda that would be intellectually suspect, and not to acknowledge one, which is dishonest—hence my statement of my position in the above paragraphs. Like E.Jane Burns (1993, p.xi) I would say that my interest in this topic is not purely theoretical but also "personal and political." I do not accept the accusation, however, that personal and political commitment to a topic means it cannot be treated as a serious academic discipline. There is a double standard at work here that must be acknowledged: Criticizing the status quo is seen as political but accepting it is not.

Susan Douglas (1994) summed up well how I myself feel when she pointed to the ambivalence toward femininity and feminism she felt: "Pulled in opposite directions—told we were equal, yet told we were subordinate; told we could change history, yet told we were trapped by history—we got the bends at an early age, and we have never gotten rid of them" (p. 9). In

this book I've tried to get rid of some of my bends. I hope others will find it "unbending" too, but not in the conventional meaning of the term as dogmatic and inflexible. I do not expect all readers to agree with me!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some of the material I include here comes from a series of lectures and practical classes I gave on the topic of language and gender at Oxford in Michaelmas Term 1993 and Hilary Term 1994. In preparing these sessions I was greatly aided by consulting the Language and Gender Syllabi Collection edited by Elizabeth Hume and Bonnie McElhinny and published by the Linguistic Society of America's Committee on the Status of Women. The collection contains 26 syllabi from courses on language and gender offered in a variety of departments, including linguistics, anthropology, English, and education. From them I got many references, ideas, and material for exercises.

I am also grateful to a number of colleagues such as Bernd Heine for the Ewe examples in chapter 4, and to Lou Burnard of the Oxford University Computing Services for help with the British National Corpus, an early pilot version of which I have used to collect some of the material in chapters 4 and 5. I would also like to thank Judi Amsel for her assistance and her comments on an early version of chapter 9.

To facilitate the use of the book as a textbook, I have tried to avoid cluttering the text itself with detailed citations and I have avoided footnotes altogether. I have mentioned some additional sources of reading at the end of each chapter and given full bibliographical details in the references at the end of the book. In the text itself, I have used specific dates after the names of scholars for whom I have cited more than one reference in the bibliography in order to make clear which particular work provided the source for what I say. Where I have quoted directly or paraphrased a particular point, I have given the date and page number in the text. Each chapter ends with discussion questions and exercises, many of which involve readers either in collecting their own data for analysis or analyzing data.

—*Suzanne Romaine*

CHAPTER

1

Doing Gender

> Language is part of man's nature, he did not create it. We are always inclined to imagine naively that there was some period in the beginning when a fully evolved man discovered someone else like him, equally evolved, and between the two of them language gradually took shape. This is pure fiction. We can never reach man separated from language, and we can never see him inventing it. We can never reach man reduced to himself, and thinking up ways of conceptualizing the existence of someone else. What we find in the world are men endowed with speech, speaking to other men, and language gives the clue to the very definition of man. (Benveniste, 1971, p. 224)

DOING AND DISPLAYING GENDER

Our biological sex is determined at birth by factors beyond our control, yet being born male or female is probably the most important feature of our lives. The first question generally asked about a new born baby is whether it is a boy or girl, just as the first thing we notice when we see someone for the first time is whether the person is male or female. Almost every official form we fill out requires us to say whether we are male or female. Physical appearance, dress, behavior, and language provide some of the most important means of identifying ourselves daily to others as male or female. When we see a baby dressed in pink with a frilly bonnet, we conclude it must be a girl. Even though unisex fashions have made gender boundaries increasingly less rigid, gender is still one of the most visible human traits;

80% of U.S. 2-year-olds can readily distinguish males from females on the basis of purely cultural cues like hairstyle and clothing.

These clues are *gender displays or indexes,* whose surface manifestations may alter culturally and historically. Such displays may also be intertwined with and reinforced by other distinctions—for example, titles like *Miss* or *Mrs.,* which mark someone not only as female, but also as single or married, or by different items of clothing worn by girls/boys, or married/unmarried women. Among the Bedouins of the Egyptian western desert, for example, married women wear black veils and red belts, whereas unmarried girls wear kerchiefs on their heads and around their waists.

Gender is thus an inherently communicative process. Not only do we communicate gender in these ways, but we also "do it" with our words. Because we construct and enact gender largely through discourse, this book is about the crucial role of language in particular and communication more generally in doing gender and displaying ourselves as gendered beings. If we hear someone talking about children named *Tommy* and *Jimmy,* we assume they are boys. When we read about scientists in the newspapers, most of us still have mental images of men, even though there are now many women scientists. When we hear someone describe a color as "baby blue," "carnation pink," "lavender," or "mauve," we imagine the speaker to be a woman rather than a man. When most people read a newspaper headline *Doctor seduced patient,* they assume the doctor is male and the patient, female (see chap. 4 for further analysis). When you read the opening epigraph to this chapter about language being part of "man's nature," did you think of women being included or excluded? Did "man" create language?

The use of the term *man* instead of a more gender-neutral term such as *human(s), humanity, people,* and so on obscures women's contributions to language and its evolution. Yet even seemingly gender-neutral terms such as *person, member of society,* and so forth are often still interpreted as masculine by default, as in this example from sociolinguist William Labov (1972a, p. xiii), where he urged linguists to turn their attention to studying "language as it is used in everyday life by members of the social order, that vehicle of communication in which they argue with their wives, joke with their friends, and deceive their enemies." Nowadays, such usage would be called "sexist" and many publishing houses have specific guidelines telling authors how to avoid language that either excludes women or stereotypes them in negative ways. These are conscious choices we as language users can make, and thanks to several decades of feminist reform, decisions not to make them increasingly stand out. During O.J.Simpson's trial in Los Angeles the courtroom paused to consider whether a male defense attorney was being sexist when he accused a female prosecuting attorney of acting "hysterical" (see chap. 2). Conversely, to accuse a male of hysteria (or being a wimp), as the press did George Bush in his unsuccessful campaign

for reelection to the presidency in 1992, was to suggest he was effeminate and therefore unfit for the office. In many areas of public life so-called "gender-neutral" language now prevails, university departments now have *chairpersons* or *chairs,* and some restaurants have *waitpersons* or *waitrons* (see chap. 10). Challenging naming practices symbolic of male possession and dominance of women, such as titles like Mrs./Miss, are part of women's linguistic revolt.

The claim that language is sexist is by no means new. In 1895 Elizabeth Cady Stanton rewrote the Bible to highlight the unjust ways in which women were spoken and written about. Nearly a hundred years later Dale Spender (1980a) brought the association between language and patriarchy to the media's attention with the claim that language is man-made. Similarly, Robin Lakoff's (1975) arguments about the political implications of what she called "women's language" put the study of women and language on the map. Lakoff showed how language served to keep women in their place. Women inherit their subordinate place as each new generation inherits sexist words. Dictionaries, grammars, and even artificial languages have been made primarily by men. What if language were "woman-made" instead of man-made? (See chap. 10 for discussion of feminist dictionaries.)

There is still no agreement on the question of whether language is sexist, and if so, wherein the origins of its sexism lie, or on the directions reform should take. Languages may vary in terms of the amount and type of sexism they display, which implies they will require different types of reform. Although English-speaking feminists have paid critical attention to language, it has been at the very heart of the French feminist debate. If the world is constructed and given meaning through language and language is "man-made," then our history, philosophy, government, laws, and religion are products of a male way of perceiving and organizing the world. Because this knowledge has been transmitted for centuries, it appears "natural," "objective," a "master" discourse beyond question. Language thus holds the key to challenging and changing male hegemony.

If women's oppression has deep linguistic roots, then any and all representations, whether of women, men, or any other group, are embedded first in language, and then in politics, culture, economics, history, and so on. This is at least one interpretation I make of Donna Haraway's (1991, p. 3) claim that "grammar is politics by other means." Howard Bloch (1991, p. 4) pointed to the central role of language when he said, "misogyny is a way of speaking about, as distinct from doing something to women." Within the approach I take here, I would claim, unlike Bloch, that speaking *about* as well as *to* women in a misogynistic way is equivalent to *doing* something harmful to them. The harm done does not need to be physical, but can arise from the creation of a hostile verbal environment. Indeed, this view now receives support from legal definitions of the term *sexual*

harassment (see chaps. 7 and 8). In a 1984 report on women in the courts Robert N.Wilentz, then Chief Justice of New Jersey, noted:

> There's no room for the funny joke and the not-so-funny joke, there's no room for conscious, inadvertent, sophisticated, clumsy, or any other kind of gender bias, and there's certainly no room for gender bias that affects substantive rights. There's no room because it hurts and it insults. It hurts… psychologically and economically, (cited in Troemel-Ploetz, 1991, pp. 455– 456)

Yet we needn't speak in words in order to do harm. A popular perfume advertisement showed a woman wearing a miniskirt and high heels (and presumably also the fragrance being advertised). The caption read: "Make a statement without saying a word." The proverbial expression about a picture being worth a thousand words applies here. The ad glamorizes the woman as a sexual object, suggesting her availability, and how her attractiveness can be enhanced if she but wears the right perfume. The ad also conveys the message that a woman's appearance and her scent communicate her sexual intent. She does not need to say anything: Her consent is implied in the way she dresses and the perfume she is being urged to put on. She has "asked for it" without saying anything (see chaps. 8 and 9).

In focusing attention on gender as a dynamic process that people index, do, display, communicate, or perform, gender itself has become a verb. This active view of gender is also consistent with bell hooks's preference for talking about "women's movement" (or "feminist movement") without the definite article, rather than "the women's movement," to emphasize activity and becoming rather than static being. Likewise, Judith Butler's (1993) notion of performance is central to the idea of gender as something we do (see chap. 2). Both talk and actions can be gendered. Although we sometimes think of communication in a narrow sense as being focused on language in its spoken, written, or even signed forms, my approach in this book takes a much broader view. Conversations, newspapers, television, advertisements, scientific and academic journals, literature, popular music, and movies are all forms of communication that send messages about as well as shape our understandings of gender. They are in effect all languages or discourses of gender involving more than words; they may include gestures or "body language," images, and ways of dressing.

When we see or hear gender being indexed or displayed through any channel of communication, our stereotypes may be activated. Gender stereotypes are sets of beliefs about the attributes of men or women, such as that men are stronger and more aggressive, women are passive, talk more than men, and so on. Stereotypes are often associated with and not easily separated from other salient variables such as race, class, culture,

age, context, and so forth. Stereotypes about how men and women speak reveal insights into our attitudes about what men and women are like or what we think they are supposed to be like. Perceived gender differences are often the result of these stereotypes about such differences, rather than the result of the actual existence of real differences. The linguistic basis for the media's accusation that George Bush was a wimp rested on the claim that he used words stereotyped as "feminine," such as "splash" of coffee and "having a chat." The image of the gossiping woman shows how easy it is to confuse expectations with actual behavior. How is the supposedly overly talkative woman to be reconciled with women's claims that they have been silenced? Who really talks more: men or women?

Much of the early research on language and gender devoted a great deal of energy to addressing the issue of "women's language" using laundry lists of specific linguistic features such as hedging (e.g., it's *kind of* late, *you know*), the use of tag questions (e.g., we're going at 6 o'clock, *aren't we?*), and so on, believed to be tied to women's subordinate status. This approach is doomed to naiveté and circularity unless it acknowledges that the same linguistic features can, when used by different persons in different contexts and cultures, often mean very different things.

This is so because different cultures vary in their expectations about what it means to be a man or woman. Western societies have a long tradition of handbooks written by both men and women showing what women had to do to be good housewives and mothers, or what it meant to be a gentleman. Women today are still faced with a barrage of advice from women's magazines, TV talk shows, and popular books. Certainly in the 19th century gender determined more of an individual's options than it does today, but even now gender can affect our expectations, as well as our activities, manners, and almost everything else.

Although language is central to our constructions of the meaning of gender, much of language is ambiguous and depends on context for its interpretation, a factor far more important than gender. On closer examination, there are few, if any, context-independent gender differences in language. In some instances men talk more than women, whereas in other situations women talk more then men. As I show in chapter 6, silence can be both a sign of oppression and resistance to it. The same words can take on different meanings and significance depending on who uses them in a particular context. Imagine the words "How about meeting for a drink later, honey?" said by a male customer to a waitress he does not know, or said by a woman to her husband as they talk over their schedules for the day. Such examples suggest that we need to seek our explanations for gender differences in terms of the communicative functions expressed by certain forms used in particular contexts by specific speakers. They also point to the complexity involved in reforming sexist language. We cannot simply propose to ban words like *sweetie* or *honey* from public communication

because they can be construed as offensive in some contexts. Some words such as *lady* (and even *gender* itself) are in certain contexts euphemisms, terms coined to avoid embarrassment at reference to the unmen tionable (i.e., *woman* and *sex*), whereas others are instances of public name-calling (see chap. 5). What we must try to change are the conventional uses of language in sexist ways. Otherwise, we get trapped in a circular argument: Men have power because men define meanings and men define meanings because men have power.

Many questions come to mind about how everyday talk and action get gendered. From a linguistic perspective, we must consider at the very least how sex and gender are actually marked in language (see chaps. 3, 4, and 5), how men and women speak across a range of different settings (see chap. 6), how children acquire whatever linguistic differences we may find (see chap. 7), how language can be sexist and how it can be reformed (see chap. 10). Many studies have identified systematic male-female differences in many languages. These range from differences in vocabulary, to differences in linguistic forms (e.g., phonology and syntax), to whole communicative styles, such as politeness, directness, and silence.

Although I give English more detailed treatment than other languages, I look at evidence from a number of languages, including other European languages such as French, German, Italian, the Nordic languages, as well as a variety of non-Western ones such as Japanese, Chinese, and Dyirbal, and even invented languages like Láadan. Japanese, for instance, is often presented as an example of a language showing extraordinary sensitivity to the social context in which it is used. There is also a long tradition of belief that Japanese has a true women's language, going back to studies of the language used by ladies of the imperial court. Much of the discussion focused on certain words having to do with food, clothing, and other domestic concerns. For example, the male word for *rice* is *mesi* and the female word *gugo*. These forms are believed to have spread out from the court into more general usage among Japanese women. Yet alleged differences in male and female speech represent only part of the picture. We must also look at how men and women are spoken about, how they are portrayed in cultural discourses in the wider sense I referred to earlier, and how ways of speaking and acting fit into cultural beliefs about the roles of women and men.

GENDER IN CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

It is no accident that many of those engaged in the study of language and gender are in fact not linguists by training, but practitioners of other disciplines. We can see from this range of questions I have raised that gender is so pervasive a feature of our everyday lives that we cannot study it

comprehensively without reference to a number of scientific disciplines such as anthropology, biology, communication, education, economics, feminist theory, history, linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Although each field of study has made important contributions to our understanding of the complexity of gender, it is all too easy to lose sight of the whole picture. We must work to make the connections between these different disciplines and not simply try to graft gender onto already existing fields of research, as suggested by titles of countless books such as *Gender and X,* where X can be anything ranging from anthropology to history, race, language, and so forth. Such titles suggest an additive rather than integrative perspective. In order to be coherent theoretically, the study of gender must involve a dialogue across disciplines, and that is the perspective I have adopted in this book.

Each of the disciplines I mentioned has naturally had its own concerns and tackled the study of gender in different ways. Anthropology, for instance, has been devoted to the study of cross-cultural differences in human behavior, which has led to skepticism about the extent to which men are "naturally" stronger, more aggressive and dominant than women. Indeed, one of the best ways to examine the interaction of society with gender is to look at other cultures with quite different arrangements for the sexes where the arrangements are regarded as equally as "natural" as our own. Despite prevailing beliefs in Western culture that have conceived of male superiority and dominance in both religious and scientific terms, male dominance is not universal or inevitable. There are both human and animal groups among which neither males dominate females, nor females dominate males. There are also societies in which women have both political and economic power, and cultures where there is minimal differentiation of gender roles. In short, there is an astonishing variety of family forms and child-raising arrangements.

If biology alone were responsible for behavior patterns, then we would not find such great cultural diversity. Being male or female is done differently in different cultures. In her work in Papua New Guinea, for example, Margaret Mead (1949) observed both Arapesh men and women behaving in a way we would think of as feminine by western standards. Other cultures are much less gender polarized than our own. Clifford Geertz (1995) described Balinese society as "unisex" and "egalitarian." Men and women wear almost identical clothing, and even though each sex has different tasks, the male/female distinction is largely irrelevant in everyday life. Within Balinese cosmology male and female creative forces stand in complete and perfect unity within the supreme deity, Siwa.

Balinese society contrasts sharply with our own, where both religion and science have sought to provide support for long-standing cultural beliefs that people are either male or female, but not both or neither (see chap. 2). Some cultures readily allow individuals to assume gender identities

opposite to their biological sex. On Pohnpei in Micronesia, Ward (1979) described how after a teenage girl named Maria began to behave like a boy, family and community met and held a feast to declare her a boy. They cut her hair, dressed her as a boy, and called her Mario. The Tewa people of the U.S. Southwest recognize a category of individuals labeled *kwidó,* who have androgynous personalities. Within Sambia society in New Guinea engaging in what many Westerners would call homosexual sexual activity is considered part of normal male sexuality (see chap. 8). A preoccupation with sexual performance in Western culture has made outward erotic behavior the basis for the dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual as identities. Yet the sexual self defined externally is not necessarily the same as the internally identified gendered self (see chaps. 2 and 11 for some of the linguistic consequences). Morover, the self can be composed of multiple identities, such as woman, feminist, Native American, and so on.

Even though a person's membership in other categories such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, and such is generally much more ambiguous, sometimes even readily changeable, and not always so openly displayed, most of us have grown up believing everyone is male or female. Monique Wittig shocked some delegates to an international women's conference when she declared she was not a woman but a lesbian. A lesbian, she said, had no sex and was beyond the binary categories of man and woman. In her 1981 autobiography, *Né homme, comment je suis devenue femme* ('Born man, how I became woman'), Brigitte Martel told of her experience as a transsexual male who became female. The French title underscores her shifting gender allegiance in a way that the English translation does not fully convey (see chaps. 2 and 11 for further examples of this kind). The past participle meaning 'born' appears in its masculine form *(né)* reflecting her previous existence as a man, whereas the past participle 'become' *(devenue)* is marked as feminine through the addition of an *-e* (see chap. 3 for further discussion of how French marks gender).

Although a broader view of sex and gender would recognize a continuum, the polar opposites of male and female have defined the basic categories. Gays, lesbians, and transsexuals have ideas about their gender identity that defy mainstream ideology that the categories are binary. There is still very little agreement on what constitutes the gender categories we label as *man, woman, lesbian,* and so on. The fragmentation within the women's movement over issues such as sexual orientation, lesbianism, and so forth raises questions about what feminism is, whom it claims to represent, and what counts as "women's experience," if indeed such a term is meaningful.

These examples suggest that our readiness to see "reality" naturally carved into male and female as polar opposites is culturally and linguistically conditioned. Gender is more a cultural performance than a natural fact:

doing rather than being. Yet biology cannot be totally dismissed as a factor in the production and reproduction of gender. The biological division into male and female is found in humans as well as many other species. Clearly there are some biological bases for defining men and women, although scientists are still not sure of the extent of biological differences (see chap. 2).

Despite its contributions to a cross-cultural understanding of variability in human sexuality, anthropology has only just begun to tackle what Edwin Ardener (1975a, 1975b) called "the problem of women." For a long time most anthropological research was men's work, based on the study of men by men. Claude Lévi-Strauss's study of the Bororo done in the 1930s provides a striking example of the invisibility of women to many of the founding fathers of anthropology. He noted how "the whole village left next day in about thirty canoes, leaving us alone with the woman and children in abandoned houses." As modern readers we may wonder how it can happen that a "whole" village can be said to have left when the women and children are still there, or that the European anthropologists are described as "alone," despite the presence of the women and children, or indeed how the houses can be thought of as "abandoned" if they are filled with the women and children. Anna Livia Brawn (1995, p. 117), who cited this example, pointed out how Lévi-Strauss made it clear three times in one sentence that he did not consider women and children to be fully human.

The availability of women as subjects of investigation was often limited in some cultures, where women were kept separate from men. Even where anthropologists could have consulted women, however, they tended to dismiss their information. Thus, in trying to understand other cultures, many anthropologists overlooked at least half the "members of society." Even one of the most important journals in the discipline still carried the title *Man* when I began writing this book in 1993! Moreover, I find it telling that Ardener labeled this failure on the part of male anthropologists to include women's voices "the problem of women"; why not call it "the problem of or with anthropology/anthropologists," or indeed, "the problem of men," or "the problem *with* men"?

Culture has also been prominent in the work of sociolinguist Deborah Tannen (1990a), who explained differences in male/female conversational style as the result of men and women being members of different cultures. Hence male/female conversation becomes cross-cultural communication, and is potentially fraught with misunderstandings (see chap. 6).

Nevertheless, gender is not just about biological and cultural difference; it is also about power. Much of this power and symbolic domination is achieved and validated through talk across a range of contexts, for example, at home, in school, in court, in the workplace, in academic journals, and so on. Crucial decisions are often arrived at on the basis of verbal

interaction in interviews, meetings, and other public encounters. Society is composed of competing discourses speaking from different perspectives and articulating different points of view. In the words of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1929/1973), society is *heteroglossic* (i.e., has different languages or voices). Those in power determine whose version of reality prevails, whose ways of behaving and speaking will be seen as normal, and whose ways deviant. The maxims of the dominant culture are presented as timeless truths of human experience. All of us are taught in school to accept the beliefs of the dominant culture. In this way male values become the values of society at large. Our ideas about what is "normal" are deeply embedded in linguistic practices. Men have the right to be referred to as *writers* or *doctors*. Women who occupy these professions are marked with special titles such as *lady/woman doctor* or *female/woman writer*. Because language is connected with the construction of our identity, questions about identity and self-definition have been at the forefront of women's movement and have focused on the right to be named as part of the struggle for self-determination. Women wish to decide how to represent themselves.

Difference tends to be defined negatively and carries with it assumptions about a hierarchy of traits associated with "Ourselves" versus "Others." Women share in common with other subordinated groups the fact that they have been persistently seen as Others (see chap. 2), for whom the traditional remedy has been assimilation to the norms of the dominant group. All subordinate groups in society, such as the working-class and ethnic and racial minorities, share similar problems. Their ways of communicating and behaving are described as deviant and illogical in relation to some other norms of behaving, which define the socially powerful. The language of the dominant group is the standard against which all other speech forms are measured. Male privilege sustains the myth that male talk is not gendered, just as those who speak Oxford English claim that it is others who speak with accents.

Whatever singles out a subordinate group will be used to justify treating its members as inferior. In this way differences, whether real or imagined, get politicized. Lack of confidence, hesitancy, and silence, for instance, are all familiar traits of oppressed and subordinated groups in their encounters with a more powerful majority. Some White educators, for example, have said that Black children are "nonverbal." Deborah Cameron (1990a) drew an analogy with sociologist of language Basil Bernstein's use (1973) of the term *restricted code* to describe the language of children of non-White and working-class origins. In both cases the judgments arose at least partly from lack of access to the so-called elaborated code, or the standard. However, if we accepted such negative beliefs about the inferiority of the language of women, Blacks, the working class, and so on, then we would have to conclude that there is something wrong with the way the majority of people speak.

Within sociolinguistics, Charles Ferguson (1959/1972) coined the term *diglossia* to refer to a situation in a multilingual community where each language or variety serves a specialized function and is used for particular purposes. An example can be taken from Arabic-speaking countries such as Egypt, in which the language used at home may be a local version of Arabic. The language recognized publicly, however, is modern standard Arabic, which takes many of its normative rules from the classical Arabic of the *Koran*. The standard language is used for "high" functions such as giving a lecture, reading, writing, or broadcasting, while the home variety is reserved for "low" functions such as interacting with friends at home. The high (H) and low (L) varieties differ not only in grammar, phonology and vocabulary, but also with respect to a number of social characteristics, namely, function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, and stability. L is typically acquired at home as a mother tongue. Its main uses are in familial and familiar interactions. H, on the other hand, is learned later through schooling and supported by institutions outside the home. The separate domains in which H (public/official/formal) and L (private/domestic/informal) are acquired immediately provide them with separate institutional support systems. Entry to formal institutions such as school and government requires knowledge of H. Speakers regard H as superior to L in a number of respects. In some cases H is regarded as the only "real" version of a particular language. There is also a strong tradition of formal grammatical study and standardization associated with H.

In other instances of diglossia two completely different languages are involved, such as in Peru, where colonialism has imposed Spanish onto an indigenous and largely Quechua-speaking society. Because more men than women are bilingual, Penelope Harvey (1994) found that men's greater access to the new prestige language gave them far more autonomy and power than women. Women are silent at public, formal meetings conducted in Spanish because they know only Quechua or have extremely limited Spanish skills.

By substituting "women's language" (or, for that matter, the language used by any subordinate group) for the low variety and men's for the high, we can see the relevance of the analogy (see chap. 10 for another example). Women have generally had less access to the contexts and institutions where the more prestigious H variety/language is acquired. Even though sociolinguists have often found women's speech to be closer to the standard in Western urban societies, women have still generally been excluded from public discourse with its formal styles of speaking and writing such as political speech making, conducting of religious services and media broadcasting (see chap. 6). It is a myth that language is equally available to all. Moreover, in societies with inequality between men and women, whatever women do will be devalued. Hence, in Western culture, sociolinguists have documented the indirectness, standardness,

and conservatism of women's speech, while in Madagascar women speak directly and are innovative. In both cases, however, women's language is seen as deviant. Societies define prestige in relation to socially and sexually dominant groups. Women in neither culture participate fully in public ceremonial domains in which H is spoken.

The onus is therefore on women to become bilingual, just as it is on less powerful groups more generally. English speakers in Wales do not need to learn Welsh, but Welsh speakers cannot do without English. So women have had to talk like men in order to be heard. Yet even when women adopt men's voices, they can be silenced with ridicule (see chap. 6).

This example shows that what is important is not the differences themselves but how they are perceived in a particular society, how they fit into a society's beliefs and stereotypes about men and women. Male dominance has often been supposed universal because we tend to equate dominance with roles played in public and official life. Men's location and activity in the public rather than domestic sphere has defined society as masculine. Hence, anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss found nothing remarkable in defining the locus of their investigations into culture as synonymous with what men do. Women may be publicly represented as subordinate but still wield considerable political and economic power. Yet the organization of life into domestic or private and public or official domains of power so fundamental to modern Western society reflects a male perspective on social life.

Language has helped to gender the way we think about space; men's space is public, in the workplace, whereas women's place is private and in the home. This difference is encoded discursively in expressions such as *working mother, businessman, housewife,* and so on, making it easier to accept as "natural" the exclusion of women from public life (see chap. 4). In Japanese these views are embodied in the terms used by husbands and wives to refer to one another. A married woman is called *Okusan* 'Mrs. Interior', signifying that her place is in the home. Japanese men call their wives *kanai* 'house insider'. Women speak of their husbands as *shujin* or *danna* or the more informal *teishu,* which means 'master of an inn or tea house'. These terms of address reflect the traditional wisdom embodied in two English proverbs: *A man's home is his castle,* and *A woman's place is in the home*. Traditional norms dictate that the husband is the bread-winner, whereas the wife is the bread baker. This is reflected historically in the Old English words *hla:fweard,* 'loafkeeper', and *hlaefdige* 'loafkneader', which became modern English 'lord' and 'lady', respectively (see chap. 4 for further discussion of pairs like *lord/lady*).

Significantly, as late as 1979, a series of letters to the editor of one of Japan's major national newspapers questioned the propriety of women reading newspapers in public while riding on trains, subways, and such. Because the subject matter of newspapers concerns public affairs, which

women have traditionally had nothing to do with, some writers felt that female passengers should confine themselves to reading paperback novels or magazines while on public transport. When Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, the media routinely identified her as a housewife. Although Thatcher was running her own household at the time, she had also served as a Cabinet Minister and could just as well have been referred to in that capacity. It is hard to imagine a similar context in which a male would be referred to with no mention of his public accomplishments or position (see chap. 4).

Discrimination against women is built into such divisions between the workplace and home, between production and reproduction, all of which are reinforced by the way we talk about them. Not only in Western cultures, but in other parts of the world, there has been a persistent misrecognition of women's work as somehow less than work. The dichotomy is reinforced linguistically by the distinction between *housework* and *work*. Only work done to produce a profit in the public sector counts as work and goes by the name of *work*. The "work" women do at home is invisible (or what Ivan Illich, 1982, called "shadow work"), unpaid, not counted in the gross national product, and goes by the special name of *housework*. Men have not only control of the marketplace, where the "real" work gets done, but also control over women's sexuality and their labor in the home. In France, until quite recently bakers' wives who sold bread all day long were classified as "unemployed" and received no pension. Their labor was expected as part of their wifely duties and therefore did not officially count.

Feminist analyses have pointed out how housework makes the modern capitalist economy feasible because it frees the man to work in the public sector by relieving him of domestic work, which has to be done and which would otherwise have to be paid for. Because women on average work 20 hours more a week than men, sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989) referred to the "second shift" that women put in at home. The cumulative effect of the work women do is that they produce time for men. In Western culture, time of course is money.

Feminist research of the last few decades has been responsible for its critical stance toward gender as an analytical category. Indeed, the very term *gender* in the contemporary senses in which I have been using it in this chapter is a product of this research; previously, it was seldom used outside linguistic discussions of noun classification (see chap. 3). Now many universities offer courses on the topic of gender, gender and language, and so forth. Some have established programs and award degrees in a field variously called "women's studies," "feminist studies," or "gender studies." The choice of names for such new programs of study may reflect differences in content and focus. While I was working on this book the University of Oxford decided to establish a master's (!) degree in women's studies from 1996. Although *gender* is not synonymous with *female,* it is

sometimes construed that way. Similarly, feminism is often taken to be synonymous with the study of women, rather than constituting a more encompassing inquiry into constructions of femaleness as well as maleness (and much more, in my view; see chap. 2).

Like any new field, the study of gender has faced opposition from critics who have tried to dismiss it as an empty discipline, motivated by politics rather than scholarship, as I said in my preface. It is worth remembering, however, that even in the 19th century the study of English language and literature was not considered a legitimate discipline at the University of Oxford. James Murray, editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* actually credited the women's movement directly for the appearance of English studies at Oxford in the 19th century. The enlargement of the state education system made the classics-based curriculum increasingly unsuitable for the many new pupils to be encompassed within it. Women and the working classes of both sexes would find the classics too intellectually demanding and needed an "easier" subject. What is deemed to be worthy of study is always subject to political interests. Universities have traditionally been organized in terms of disciplines and departments with little overlap, rather than in terms of cross- or interdisciplinary programs. This too has been responsible for lack of a truly integrative perspective.

Many aspects of gender are more often studied by women than men. When writing his book on gender, Ivan Illich, for instance, found himself in a "double ghetto." He was unable to use many traditional words because they were sexist. Never before had so many colleagues and friends tried to dissuade him from his work with suggestions that it was trivial and ambiguous. Talk about women was not for men. Within sociolinguistics both mainstream men and women have taken up the cause of working-class speech, the languages of minority groups, and so on as central problems of the discipline, but women's words are still studied largely by women. Talk about women's talk is not for men either. In a similar vein, anthropologist Edwin Ardener (1975b, p. 20) recalled a female colleague saying "no anthropological book with 'women' in the title sells." Worthwhile intellectual discourse has been assumed to be male (see chap. 11 for similar reactions to feminist science fiction).

Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet (1992) pointed out that the effect of a new research focus on women has perpetuated a long-standing view of men as normal, and women as deviant. Indeed, much of the early work on gender focused on finding differences and highlighted, in particular, women's deviance from a supposed male norm. There are dangers involved in looking at women's language and behavior as having special status. In the next chapter I look at some of the repercussions of this thinking in the fields of biology, linguistics, philosophy, and psychology. A good illustration from the field of linguistics is philologist Otto Jespersen's inclusion of a chapter in his book on language (1922) devoted to "The Woman." There

was no corresponding chapter on "The Man." The assumption is that men's language is simply language and requires no special discussion. Since then the focus has moved from "women's language" to a broader consideration of gender and language. The titles of more recently published books and collections reflect this change in emphasis. For example, Jennifer Coates called her 1988 book *Women, Men, and Language* (similarly, Joan Swann, 1992, wrote about *Girls, Boys, and Language*); Dennis Baron (1986) called his book *Grammar and Gender*. This shift reorients the field away from documenting women's supposed deviance from male norms, not merely to a study of differences and what they mean but to understanding interactions between men and woman. The concepts of both masculinity and femininity are in need of critical evaluation, as I show in the next chapter.

THE WORLD OF WORDS: COMMUNICATING GENDER THROUGH LANGUAGE

I have already mentioned many of the reasons why language is so central to the study of gender. As my opening epigraph says, "We can never reach 'man' separated from language…language gives the clue to the very definition of man." Language is a uniquely human trait. When children learn to talk, they learn to create a linguistic sense of self. This self is gendered from a very early age. The conventional approach to meaning within linguistics is that we use language to describe the world, but we use it to do much more than that. With language we bring different worlds into being. I have already given many examples of how language plays an active role in the symbolic positioning of women as inferior to men. It both constructs and perpetuates that reality, often in obvious ways, but at other times in subtle and invisible ones. The verbally represented world is gendered.

Language is the primary means through which we understand the world and our place within it. "In the beginning was the word" (Genesis 1:1). It is the world of words that creates the world of things and ideas. We do things with words. The Bible relates how even before God created Eve, he brought all the animals to Adam to "see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Genesis 2:19). If the world is brought into being through acts of naming, then naming a thing is the first stage in appropriating it and assuming power over it (see chap. 5). Language can alter reality rather than simply describe it. When a minister or judge says "I now pronounce you man and wife" to a man and woman legally entitled to be married, they do indeed become for legal purposes husband and wife. Persons with the appropriate authority to perform a marriage ceremony do more than just describe a situation when they utter those words. They actually perform the wedding. Saying so makes it so. Note too how recent changes in laws in states such as

Hawaii recognize so-called *same-sex marriage*. Here the special term marks the union as different from our conventional understanding of *marriage*.

Linguists, however, have paid far more attention to the descriptive rather than to the more performative, social functions of language. In doing so, they have emphasized the basic arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. In other words, there is no physical correspondence between linguistic signals that make up a name and the things they refer to. The animal that English speakers call *pig* is what speakers of the Manam language in Papua New Guinea call *boro*. Conversely, the Danish word for 'girl' *(pige)* sounds very similar to the English word for 'pig'. Nevertheless, we all have a deeply ingrained feeling of inherent aptness in the words of our own language and that a particular word expresses exactly how we feel or think about something. As Aldous Huxley's character Old Rowley commented while pointing to swine wallowing in the mud, "Rightly is they called pigs" (Huxley, 1921). Yet the fact that other languages have completely different words shows that there is nothing in the words themselves bearing a necessary relationship to the animal.

If this principle of arbitrariness were absolute, what can we make of Dale Spender's (1980a) claim that English is a "man-made language" in which women are systematically marked as deviant and deficient? Moreover, other languages not related to English show similar patterns reflecting negative cultural beliefs about women (see chaps. 3, 4, and 5). Can it be accidental that language ignores and deprecates women, defines women as secondary to men, and names women's experiences as trivial or even denies their very existence?

Probably at one time or another we have all been lost for words to express a particular feeling or experience we have had. Betty Friedan (1963), founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and sometimes called the "mother of the modern women's movement" in the United States, raised the consciousness of women with her detailed discussion of what she called "the problem that has no name." More recently, she wrote (Friedan, 1981) of new problems that have no names. Although Friedan in 1963 was not primarily concerned with linguistic issues, her book underlined the inadequacy of language to name and discuss women's experiences. There are still no names for some of the problems Friedan discussed more than 30 years ago, but bringing them into people's consciousness by writing about them can be a liberating experience in itself (see chap. 9). Silence is itself a form of oppression. Women such as Mary Daly have created numerous terms for areas of female experience which have no names (see chap. 10). English has no expression corresponding to *virility* to refer to female potency. Elsie Clews Parsons observed that the sexual vocabulary of women was inadequate for discussing their own sexuality, let alone that of men. We see an interesting case of this in chapter 8.

Language can make social inequalities visible or invisible. As I have

shown, some problems have been stigmatized as "women's problems" through the names given to them, such as the *feminization of poverty*. This label refers to the prediction that by the year 2000, 90% of all people living below the poverty line in the United States will be older women and young women with dependent children. Here only the name is new; the problem itself is old. Economist Claudia Goldin observed that poverty has always been feminized. Why do we not refer to it as the *masculinization of wealth?*

Language has surely been a significant rhetorical weapon in what Susan Faludi (1991) called the "backlash" against feminism. In the rhetorical battle about reproduction the stakes are high because all of women's aspirations and struggles for self-determination rest on having the right to decide whether and when to have children. The issue of women's reproductive freedom has thus been the target of the most severe backlash. Although communication between parties with conflicting views and interests is the first prerequisite for containment of conflict and the possibility of resolution, each side uses different language to stake a claim on a particular version of reality. The Mandate for Leadership II, a right-wing group opposed to women's rights, realized that

> the most important battle in the civil rights field has been for control of the language—especially, such words as "equality" and "opportunity." The secret to victory, whether in court or in congress, has been to control the definition of these terms. (Butler, Sanera, & Weinrod, 1984, p. 74)

A combination of slogans, advertising, and semantic obfuscation lies at the heart of the anti-abortion campaign. Anti-abortionists describe themselves as "pro-life" and "pro-family," whereas those who advocate women's right to abortion call themselves "pro-choice." By appropriating the positive member of an opposition between *pro* and *anti,* they want us to believe that if we don't agree with them, we are therefore against family and against life.

The New York Archdiocese of the Catholic Church proposed establishing a new order of nuns, to be called "Sisters of Life," who would devote themselves exclusively to opposing abortion. The Catholic Church promoted the slogan "The Natural Choice is Life," suggesting that proponents of abortion were advocating something unnatural. No doubt the church was very much aware that people would remember how advertisers had exploited the connection between popular products like Coca-Cola and the words *natural* and *life* in catchy slogans such as "Coke is natural" and "Coke adds life." Robin Lakoff (1992) pointed out how effective the jux-taposition of the words *life, natural,* and *choice* is. The slogan exploits the fact that these are among the words that provoke the strongest possible positive response in people (see chap. 9). Yet the choice

supposedly offered by the slogan is a real choice only if abortion is freely available and women have the information necessary to make an decision as well as access to medical facilities.

Feminists who are "pro-choice" are branded as "child killers" and against the "rights of the fetus." They are accused of hating motherhood and children. Thus, their opposition to women's entry into the work force is called "pro-motherhood" and "pro-family," and anger at women's sexual freedom is called "pro-chastity." Conservatives lobby against women's rights by saying they are for "family rights." Some of the backlashers were women who claimed to be feminists or even "neofeminists." New labels were created to refer to "old feminists" who were overambitious career women. They became in the new rhetoric "macho feminists" or victims of what Betty Friedan called "female machismo."

Similarly, the Pro-Life Action League realized the strategic significance of language in the debate about abortion. When speaking to the press, its director Joseph Scheidler advised in his book *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion* (1985), use the word "baby" or "unborn child" instead of "fetus." "You don't have to surrender to their vocabulary.... They will start using your terms if you use them" (p. 53). The book urged opponents of abortion to be positive and to present themselves positively as being "for protection for the unborn," rather than negatively as "anti-abortionists." In slogans such as "Baby-killing is murder," the use of humanizing terms such as *baby* and *child* instead of technical, medical terms like *embryo* and *fetus* served to conceptualize abortion as equivalent to murder. Other slogans, such as "Everyone deserves to be born," presuppose and assert that the unborn are persons too, with rights equivalent to those who have already been born. Thus, the campaign sets up an equation where fetus=baby= person. In this rhetoric of reproduction, women's bodies are passive. They are simply the containers for new life. Scheidler, for instance, spoke of a woman's body after abortion as a "haunted house where the tragic death of a child took place." When the woman is portrayed as simply the vessel carrying the child, the child's rights as a person appear to be morally greater than those of the mother.

Conversely, by using technical terms from the medical domain such as *embryo* and *fetus,* those in favor of abortions could try to focus the discussion on abortion as a surgical procedure with no moral implications. Embryos and fetuses have no independent existence outside the mother's womb, whereas the term *baby* conjures up an image of a human being with a separate body and life of its own. Abortion then becomes a willful taking of the life of a child.

Another book advocated using the language feminists used in their fight for the right to their own bodies. "The baby has to have a choice" and "Equal rights for unborn children" became slogans at demonstrations. Margaret Sanger, birth control pioneer and founder of Planned Parenthood,

was called a "whore" and an "adulteress" by Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, dedicated to blockading abortion clinics, counseling women against abortion, and providing homes for unwed mothers. Terry opposed any form of contraception as well as sex education.

Slogans and slick rhetoric obscure what are actually complex and controversial issues about the meanings of the words *life* and *human*. As can be seen in the debate raging about euthanasia or assisted suicide and other terms such as *brain-dead,* the opposite end of the human life continuum is equally problematic: When does human life end? Who decides? The moral, medical, and legal ambiguities surrounding both the beginning and end of life are considerable. The anti-abortion campaign makes use of pictures of late-term fetuses, which are more clearly human like, although only 11% of abortions in the United States occur after the first trimester. Although a fetus during the first trimester of development has many of the characteristics of a baby, the central nervous system has not yet matured to the point where the fetus can feel pain or have other human-like qualities. If we define "life" in terms of possession of human-like qualities, then the fetus has not yet reached that stage, even though it has the capacity to do so.

Danet (1980) discussed a case involving a doctor convicted of manslaughter after he carried out a late abortion. Vocabulary became an explicit topic of negotiation and conflict in the trial. Although sentences such as *the fetus was aborted* and *the baby was murdered* can be used to describe the same event, the choice between them reflects crucial difference in world view that can have legal implications. If no "person" existed, then no crime of manslaughter could have occurred. Notice too how the passive construction does not name the person who commits the murder or performs the abortion (see chap. 4).

Both Robin Lakoff (1992) and George Lakoff (1996) pointed out semantic and moral inconsistencies in the conservative pro-life campaign. One would logically expect someone who is "pro-life" to also be in favor of tighter gun control laws, to be against the death penalty, to oppose war, and possibly even to defend animal rights. Yet most conservatives share none of these causes, which also aim to preserve life. It is at the very least inconsistent to be against abortion, but at the same time not provide people with the information and medical services available to prevent unwanted pregnancies. The majority of pro-lifers also would admit abortion if a woman has been the victim or rape or incest. These inconsistencies all indicate that pro-lifers are not really pro-life or pro-children as much as they are against women's rights to control their sexuality and reproduction. Because some men feel they will lose in the short term from women's equality, they oppose any measure that will give women a greater say in determining their own lives.

Nevertheless, there are also many women who are pro-life. Robin Lakoff believed such women may be motivated by fear at the prospect of choice itself because they have been socialized into a world where women are passive. Having choices to make is a frightening prospect because you may make the wrong choice and have to take responsibility for your decisions. Lakoff wrote that for such women "pro-choice" rhetoric is terrifying. According to Lakoff, Attorney Elizabeth Bader has suggested reconceptualizing the debate by referring to the pro-life camp as being for "forced motherhood" and the pro-choice camp as being for "voluntary motherhood." Lakoff herself suggested that the pro-choice movement ought to use similar visual campaign tactics and air commercials showing terrified teenagers seeking illegal abortions from unqualified back-alley practitioners. They could also adopt slogans such as "Life is love" and "Choose to live" or "Forced motherhood: the choice of the past."

LANGUAGE: LOADED WEAPON OR BROKEN TOOL?

The discourse in which the debate on abortion has been carried out shows clearly how different versions of reality are constantly being negotiated. There is no such thing as neutral or objective language. As Dwight Bolinger (1980) suggested, language is a loaded weapon. Words clearly have the power to influence our thinking and to direct our consciousness to certain areas of our experience at the same time as they take our attention away from others. The ability to impose one particular view of reality while suppressing others derives not from language itself, but from the power of the dominant group.

No particular language or way of speaking has a privileged view of the world as it "really" is. The world is not simply the way it is, but what we make of it through language. The domains of experience that are important to cultures get grammaticalized into languages. All languages give names to concepts of cultural importance and mark certain categories in their grammars, such as male versus female, one versus more than one, past versus future, and so forth. Yet no two languages are sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The many languages of the world are therefore a rich source of data concerning the structure of our conceptual categories. Much has been made of superficial linguistic facts such as that English has no word corresponding to German *Schadenfreude,* "happiness about someone else's misfortune," or that in many languages spoken in Papua New Guinea the same word is used for *hair,* feather, and *fur,* or that in Russian *mir* can mean both *peace* and *world*. When the language we acquire as children makes certain distinctions in the world around us, our conceptual system pays attention to them. We see the world through the categories of our native language. In this respect the concepts

we learn to form and the categories we construct are influenced by the language we learn. This idea is often attributed to Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956), who compared the world views held by speakers of English and Hopi (a Native American language). He argued that speakers were led to very different conceptual systems by virtue of the different structures of their languages. We can now understand another sense in which we cannot "reach man separated from language, and we can never see him inventing it," as the epigraph to this chapter suggests. Each of us inherits the language of the community into which we are born. As philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958) put it, "the limits of my language are the limits of my world" (p. 10).

A useful way of conceptualizing some of the structural differences is to think of languages as varying not so much in what it is possible to say, as in what it is unavoidable to say. In Spanish and many other European languages it is not possible to say something such as *you are tired* without indicating the sex of the person spoken to and the relationship the speaker has to the addressee. To say *estas cansada* means not simply *you are tired,* but that the addressee is female (compare masculine *cansado*) and the speaker knows her well enough to address her in the intimate second person singular form (compare the polite form *esta*). The different male and female endings *-a/-o* are gender displays or indexes. Comparing English and Spanish in this regard, we can say that Spanish speakers are obliged by virtue of the fact that they speak Spanish to make such distinctions of status and gender. These distinctions have been "grammaticalized," or made obligatory, in Spanish, whereas they have not in English. It is not possible to translate a sentence such as *I hired a new worker* into Russian without knowing whether the worker was male or female.

It is not true that English speakers cannot make the kinds of distinctions made in Russian and Spanish. We can, but we have encoded them in other ways such as through the use of titles, and such distinctions are not obligatorily encoded for second-person pronouns. English does, in fact, encode gender in its third-person pronouns, that is, *she/he, her/him, hers/his,* whereas Finnish does not. Japanese men and women use different sets of first- and second-person pronouns. Just where in a language gender or other differences will turn up is an interesting empirical question that still needs much more investigation. Javanese has no inflections for gender but is grammatically stratified into minutely graded hierarchical speech registers, whereas Moroccan Arabic has gender inflections, but little in the way of status marking. The linguistic markers of gender often index other social distinctions such as status and vice versa. Thus, gender cannot be considered separately from social status.

Certainly pronoun systems are one strategic site in languages where social information of various kinds is often grammaticalized and can be used to maintain, create, or transform social relations, as we see in chapters

4 and 5. This is why pronouns along with occupational titles and other forms of address are frequent targets of language reform.

Because language and language reform have played crucial roles in feminist theories and in the struggle for gender equity, clarification of the relationship between language, thought, and reality is essential. As Deborah Cameron (1990a) pointed out, what we believe about the debate on language makes a big difference. If we say women lack the means for expressing their world view in language and are therefore silenced, the problem is linguistic. If, however, women are muted because the language they speak is unacceptable to men, the problem is one of power.

According to one view on the question of the relationship between language and reality that has informed the task of reform, language attaches labels to things that are already there. Therefore, language simply reflects the society and culture of its speakers—a view I refer to as *language as symptom*. Casey Miller and Kate Swift (1991), for instance, are typical of those who see their job as reforming language so that it catches up with the new nonsexist society being created. They focus their attack on providing gender neutral alternatives for sex-differentiated job titles, masculine pronouns used as generics, and a few other key areas where male bias is particularly visible.

Others, however, such as Spender, see the relationship as being the other way around—that is, language determines, causes, or at least influences or shapes society and our perception of the world—a view I refer to as *language as cause*. The language-as-cause position credits language with a more active role in creating gender divisions and, accordingly, in being able to remedy gender-related inequalities. If you believe that language determines reality, then changing language offers a way of altering reality. The dream of a common language has enticed women such as Andrea Dworkin, for whom language is still a broken tool, sexist and discriminatory to the core (see chap. 11 for an example of how this dream has figured in feminist science fiction). The special problem for women is that they can only express themselves in the language that symbolizes the way men have perceived the world to be, a language Julia Penelope has called PUD (patriarchal universe of discourse; see chap. 4). Women have no way of understanding what their own experience is, because the very tool they must use to express themselves is biased against them.

Women like Dworkin and Wittig feel that their inner female selves are not in synchrony with their verbal selves—they are selves divided by language (see chap. 11). Women have to search for the words that give meaning to their existence, which in the male world and ways of talking has been unspoken and nameless. In a man-made language you either see yourself through male eyes and become alienated, or you become silent. Opting for the former is the equivalent of becoming bilingual, an all too common solution advocated

in the advice industry in the form of seminars teaching women to behave and speak like men in order to succeed in the business world (see chap. 6). This means accepting as normal and legitimate a male point of view, one of whose central principles is misogyny. Writers such as Dworkin and Daly have pointed to Chinese foot binding, which maimed women for 1,000 years, and witch hunting, which may have killed as many as nine million women, as examples of men's systematic oppression of women on a massive scale.

For French feminists in particular, the task is to deconstruct the patriarchal vision by focusing on the processes by which language creates meanings. Any attempt to speak within current discourse structures will merely reproduce them. Women cannot simply mimic a language we have had no share in creating. Targeting reform in a piecemeal fashion will not rid a language of sexism. Cosmetic changes such as replacing *chairman* with *chairperson,* which are characteristic of the Anglo-American women's movement, are not sufficient. For French feminists such reform is even dangerous because it encourages women to believe they can work within the existing system. As I show in chapter 10, some of these reforms have not actually eradicated sexist distinctions in language use. It is still possible to use reformed language without changing one's thought processes. The preoccupation with equality in the Anglo-American struggle does not effectively challenge the patriarchal construction of society. Women merely equal to men would be like them. In this way differences between men and women don't count or are ignored. To use a gaming metaphor, women would be simply equal players in a predominantly male game still played by male rules. But many women would prefer to change the rules of the game.

MULTIPLE JEOPARDY: GENDER, RACE, AND CLASS

As I have already said, it is not only women who are excluded from the institutions of power and their discourses. Gender inequality is never independent of hierarchies based on class, race, and ethnicity. This reminds us that the androcentric world is primarily a construction of upper middle-class, White, heterosexual men. Generic "man" thus stands for White men, and all others are lesser men.

The apparent universality and uniqueness of women's oppression has nevertheless led some feminists to argue for the primacy of gender over race, class, and other variables, which are all components of our identities. As far as language is concerned, Donna Haraway (1991, pp. 241–242) observed interestingly that there is no linguistic marker to distinguish biological and cultural race as there is for biological sex and cultural gender. She wrote

that the absence of a linguistic marker for race underlines the fact that race, unlike gender, is a totally arbitrary cultural construction with no biological foundation. Nevertheless, race and class, like gender, are lenses through which we understand social patterns. The gap in school achievement between high- and low-income children, for example, is greater than that between low-income boys and girls. Even wealthy women's money does not guarantee them access to power. In some societies the constraints on upper class women could be even more severe than those on their working class counterparts. In 16th-century Guatemala and Mexico, for example, many daughters of ruling families never left home until the day of their wedding. Moreover, they never spoke while eating or raised their eyes above the ground. In 18th-century England it was still considered unseemly for a titled woman such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to publish her views on scientific topics such as the desirability of smallpox inoculations. Nevertheless, the constraints on women of her class and color were and still are of a different nature from those of her less privileged sisters, whether they are factory workers or housewives.

A Native American woman, for instance, is oppressed both as a Native American and as a woman, a condition sometimes called *double* or *multiple jeopardy*. Although both racial and sexual difference marginalize Black women, for many minority women the issue has been one of priorities. Where do the loyalties of an African American woman lie? With women who fight male dominance, with African Americans more generally, who fight White racism, or with women of color who fight both? Within discussions of race, gender often takes second place, whereas within gender studies, race often gets short shrift. As I observed earlier, the discourses of racism and sexism share much in common in terms of their arguments and style of argumentation (see chap. 3).

When bell hooks began research in the 1970s about the place of Black women in discussions of feminism and racism, she recalled being ridiculed by both friends and strangers. One person asked her what there was to say about Black women. When hooks brought up the topic of racism at White middle-class feminist gatherings, she was accused of changing the subject. She noted that no other group had their identity so socialized out of existence as had Black women, who had been brought up to regard racism as the most important dimension of their identity. Thus, they tended to devalue femaleness and did not identify with White feminists' ideas about womanhood, even though some White feminists associated themselves with Black advocacy on the grounds of a shared experience of slavery. For many women marriage has been a form of domestic servitude—as conveyed in the term *wedlock*. Both slaves and women have been victims of paternalism. Slave owners in the southern United States claimed it was as impertinent to criticize slavery as it was to tell a White man how to treat his wife and children. Father always knew best.

In fact, the women who organized the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, generally regarded as the official beginning of the women's rights movement in the United States, had long been active in the antislavery movement. Their political commitment to abolition of slavery and to women's rights was founded on the similarity between the legal status of married women and that of slaves as male property (despite the obvious contradiction implied by the very real differences in the daily experiences of female slaves and White housewives).

hooks (1981, 1989) also pointed out how historians have more often emphasized the emasculating effects of slavery on Black men while ignoring the plight of Black women who were victimized by Whites, male and female alike, as well as by Black men. While Black men were primarily exploited as field labor, Black women did conventional women's work in White households and performed men's heavy field jobs. They were also assaulted by White masters and forced to breed. This contributed more generally to a devaluation of Black womanhood by American society at large (see chap. 8). Black women were even denied the titles *Miss* and *Mrs*. White men jeered at Sojourner Truth that they didn't believe she was really a woman when she addressed the second annual convention of the women's rights movement in 1852. Speaking just after a White man had told the audience there could be no equal rights for women because they were too weak to perform their share of manual labor and therefore innately inferior, she told them how she had plowed and planted as well as given birth to five children, most of whom had been sold into slavery.

When the question of Black suffrage became a political issue, many White women realized that for the majority of White men, Black suffrage meant male suffrage, and the issue was polarized along the axes of sexism and racism. Language played a key role in making Black women invisible, hooks showed how statements about "Blacks" or "Negroes" were really about Black men, whereas references to "women" focused on White women. As an example, she cited (1989, p. 7) a passage explaining White feminists' reaction to White male support of Black male suffrage in which the author writes about how shocked the women were that "men would so humiliate them by supporting votes for Negroes but not for women." What hooks failed to note about this statement, however, is how it also demonstrates that the default interpretation of the word *man/men* is "White man/men." Black women faced a double bind: To support Black male suffrage was to endorse a patriarchal social order in which they would have no voice, but to support women's suffrage would ally them with White women, who abandoned the Black cause once they realized that Black men might get the vote, whereas they would not. Despite the outspokenness of activists like Sojourner Truth, who recognized that sexist oppression was just as much a threat to Black women's freedom as racism, Black men were given the vote.

Although sexism prevented White women from playing the dominant role in racism, it did not exempt them from participating in it, and racism has tended to preclude any significant bonding between Black and White women on grounds of sex. When the civil rights movement began in the 1950s, racism was the most prominent issue, but it was understood more specifically to be concerned with Black men. Black male leaders were reluctant to acknowledge the ways in which they along with White men had oppressed Black women. The Black Muslim movement, for example, accepted many of the founding myths of Muslim belief about the impurity and sexual inferiority of women that I discuss in the next chapter. The movement defined Black liberation as being synonymous with entry into the existing patriarchal nation, demanding elimination of racism, but not sexism or capitalism. Once again, for Black women to side with "women" meant in effect accepting racism and betraying the cause of Black liberation, whereas to side with "Blacks" meant endorsing patriarchy.

It is nevertheless predictable that within the Black rights movement racial liberation should be conceived of as the restoration of Black masculinity. Because subjugation has been associated with femininity within the Western cultural tradition I discuss in the next chapter, it has seemed "natural" that the focus should be on transcending what is perceived as feminine rather than on rethinking not just the foundations of racism, but the notions of masculinity and femininity. Thus, White politicians such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1986) argued that a matriarchal family structure was what prevented Blacks from assimilation into mainstream American life. Working Black women who were heads of households were blamed for castrating men through their refusal to allow Black men to assume the traditional patriarchal role of providing for their families. This approach seeks a cure for racism in restoring sexist views of masculinity rather than challenging them.

hooks's (1995) analysis exposed the fallacy behind essentialism with its assumption that we can divorce the issue of race from sex, or either of those from class. Crenshaw (1989) used the term *intersectionality* to examine how class, race, and gender are intertwined in African American women's lives today. She pointed out that in most legal decisions involving Black women, African American women's issues are still not considered typical of women's issues because they are Black and at the same time are not viewed as typical of Black issues because they are women. Sexual orientation and gender identity pose additional variables.

Audre Lorde (1982, p. 203) wrote about her reaction to her White female partner's claim that as lesbians they were "all niggers" and therefore all equal in their outsiderhood because gays were just as oppressed as Blacks in general. She noted, however, that in the 1950s lesbians were the only women who were engaged in trying to build solidarity of the type the women's movement in the 1970s was trying to promote. Among White

lesbians, Black lesbians faced a slightly less hostile world than they did in the outer world, which defined them as nothing because they were Black and female. Yet even within this group there was competition for partners, and beauty was defined according to White standards. Lorde felt that her nonconformity to norms within the gay community at times marginalized her. She wasn't cute or passive enough to be a conventional "femme," nor tough enough to be a "butch." For Lorde, it was hard enough to be Black, let alone being Black and female or Black, female, and gay. She had this to say on the position of Black lesbians vis-à-vis feminism (Lorde, 1982, p. 226):

> Being women together was not enough. We were different. Being gay-girls together was not enough. We were different. Being Black together was not enough. We were different. Being Black women together was not enough. We were different. Being Black dykes together was not enough. We were different.... It was a while before we came to realize that our place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference.

Although Lorde agreed with Daly and Dworkin that the oppression of women knows no ethnic or racial boundaries, she stressed the many ways in which patriarchy's tools of oppression varied within those boundaries. A view of sisterhood founded only on shared victimization and male dominance is limiting. Although solidarity is often rooted in shared history, it can also be based on political choice and commitment. Women who fear giving up on the idea of essential femaleness fear that in doing so we will lose a basis for organized resistance.

In this chapter I have touched on the three so-called *gender lenses* through which Sandra Bem (1993) said our own culture has viewed the world: gender polarization into male and female, androcentrism (i.e., male-centered), and biological essentialism (i.e., belief that biology overrides culture). These lenses conspire to make the present inequalities between the sexes seem natural and inevitable rather than historically and culturally constructed. I have indicated how language assists in this conspiracy.

Bem (1993, p. 169) also pointed out that every "otherized" group needs to look *at* the lenses of a dominant culture rather than *through* them in order to develop an oppositional consciousness. In this way the group can challenge the marginal position assigned to them by the dominant group as well as the seeming neutrality of the dominant perspective. In the next chapter I deal with some of the central issues in feminist theory seen from the vantage point of language and communication. This is necessary due to the emphasis within the study of language and gender on the issue of whether there are systematic differences between male and female language, which is really to ask a more specific version of the central question in the debate

on female inequality, namely, whether men and women are fundamentally the same or different.

EXERCISES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Examine some personal dating ads, which often appear in a variety of newspapers, to see if there are patterns in the way in which gender is displayed. How do men and women describe themselves? What do men and women say they want in a partner? What labels do people use to describe their sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and so on? Here are four rather conventional examples from the *Los Angeles Times Classified Datelines* (February 26, 1995, pp. 5–7) to get you started.

Under the heading *Women seeking men*:

> pretty Calif.[ornia] lady, 22, blnd [blond]/blu[e-eyed] true romantic ISO [in search of] a sweet charming cute sucsfl. [successful] SWM [single white male] 23–32 4 [for] poss.[ible] rel.[ationship]
>
> feminine, funny, caring, classy JF [Jewish female] ISO N/S [nonsmoker] tall, romantic, sucsfl. SJM [single Jewish Male] who's serious about love.

Under the heading *Men seeking women*:

> affluent DWM [divorced white male], seeks slim, fit female 25–35 with a sense of humor who enjoys Santa Anita races fine dining & sports. Prefer long hair and buxom.
>
> cute sweet fun guy in mid 20s looking for someone with sense of humor/smile.

2. Some critics of gender studies and feminism have claimed that the issues they raise are of relevance only to White middle-class women. What do you think? Is there a distinction between gender studies and feminist research?

3. In the introduction to her book *Perceiving Women,* anthropologist Shirley Ardener (1975a, p. xviii) wondered whether our own category "women" might not be "an entirely intellectual creation which one day may disappear." If there is so much variation in our present-day models of women, do women have anything in common that makes them distinctly female?

4. Judith Butler (1990, 1993) used the drag show to illustrate the performative nature of gender, a practice that many women consider to be misogynist and degrading. Discuss the implications and meanings of the drag show for concepts of the sexed and gendered self.