



# F E M I N I S T F R O N T I E R S II



RETHINKING SEX, GENDER,  
AND SOCIETY



LAUREL RICHARDSON / VERTA TAYLOR



# FEMINIST FRONTIERS II

*Rethinking Sex, Gender,  
and Society*

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*To our mothers  
Rose Foreman Richardson and  
Alice F. Houston  
and to our “sisters”  
Jessica Richardson Phillips and  
Betty Jo Hudson*

# P R E F A C E

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The first edition of *Feminist Frontiers* was conceived in the late 1970s, when large numbers of women inside and outside academia were recognizing and challenging the extent to which male dominance permeated the structure of societies around the world. The articles in the first edition reflected the newness of feminist thought and sought to document the nature and causes of women's subordinate status. The anthology was published in the early 1980s during a period that brought a backlash against feminism and witnessed the rise of movements seeking to reinstate traditional roles for and ideas about women and men. There is no doubt that the situation of women has changed since the 1970s. Gender inequality, however, has not disappeared. Over the past decade, feminists have refined and enlarged their understanding of the ways that gender inequality operates and is sustained. Embarking as we are on the last decade of the twentieth century, we are fortunate to be writing, teaching, and learning at a time when feminist thought and research are flourishing and deepening. It is simultaneously a time of enjoying the bounty of feminist scholarship and of sowing new feminist seeds.

Feminist thought seeks to transform in fundamentally profound ways all the old patriarchal ways of seeing, defining, thinking about, and understanding our experiences and the social world. Contemporary feminist thought views the accomplishment of this transformation as a global activity, and as one which must take account of differences and diversity. Class, ethnicity, race, sexual identity, age, and gender are all relevant to a feminist understanding of the social world. To present contemporary feminist scholarship to the student, we offer *Feminist Frontiers II: Rethinking Sex, Gender, and Society*.

This book can be used as the major or supplementary text in courses on the sociology of women, women's studies, sex roles, and the psychology of women. In addition, because the book offers a general framework of analysis, it can be used as a supplementary text in introductory sociology courses and in courses on social problems, foundations of society, comparative studies, and American studies.

The articles in *Feminist Frontiers II* underscore that cultural, racial, ethnic, and other differences are pervasive, and pervasively intersect with gender. Although we have retained some articles from the first edition, more than two-thirds of the readings are new to this edition. We have sought out many new cross-cultural and comparative articles. In selecting such works, we have looked for ma-

terial that lends itself to discussion by people with no previous knowledge of the culture under consideration. In addition, we have added some early writings that have become feminist classics.

*Feminist Frontiers II* is organized into three parts, each introduced by a sociological-feminist analysis. Part One, "Learning Sex and Gender," has two sections, "Language and Images" and "Socialization." The six sections of Part Two, "Organization of Sex and Gender," provide theoretical explanations for sex-based inequality and discuss the social organization of work and family, sexuality and intimate relationships, medicine and science, politics, and violence against women. Part Three, "The Feminist Movement," documents the diversity of the feminist movement and looks toward its future.

This book begins with material that is easily apprehended because it deals with familiar socialization experiences. The more complex and theoretical material in Section Three, "Explanations of Sex-Based Inequality," may then be introduced as a framework for the later substantive articles—or may be postponed or omitted, according to the instructor's needs. The remaining sections lead students to consider concrete issues and to take part in the dialogue between social order and social change, with emphasis on the ways the social world is changed through individual, interpersonal, and collective action.

As we set about the task of selecting articles for this edition, we found an abundance of excellent ones on some topics and few or none on others. We established a set of criteria for choosing articles and for balancing the entire collection. First, we wanted each article to be well written and accessible in style and language; we wanted the articles to stimulate the reader's thought and vision. Second, we wanted the selections to explore contemporary theory and issues and to reflect the tremendous growth in depth and understanding of feminist scholarship. Third, we wanted to include materials on a diversity of racial, ethnic, generational, and cultural experiences. Fourth, we wanted the articles to represent the cross-disciplinary nature of gender research. And fifth, we wanted some of the articles to provide research models that students could replicate. When we could not locate an existing article that met our criteria on a particular topic, we asked colleagues to write or revise a work specifically for this volume. The result is a collection that links well-written and significant articles within a more general sociological and feminist perspective.

With the greatest pleasure we acknowledge the support, skill, and help of the many people who have made this volume a reality. We have found the contributing authors to be exceptionally generous, caring, and astute individuals. We are appreciative of their contributions. We especially thank Bert Lummus, our editor, for believing in and supporting this project, and we thank Pat Plunkett, Beena Kamlani, and Jennifer Sutherland for shepherding the book through its many restructurings.

Phyllis Gorman has been with this project from its inception. She has spent endless hours at the library tracking down articles and even more hours teaching the material to her women's studies classes and keeping us informed about its "teachability." Kelly McCormick joined the project for the second edition, and her aid in reading material, teaching it to her classes, and sharing her experiences with us has been invaluable. We thank our colleagues Claire Robinson and Leila Rupp for giving generously of their time and expertise by suggesting articles for the second edition. We are very grateful to Dianne Small and Annette Lendacki, who aided the revision project through their technical know-how and their good spirits, and to Gina Laudick, who helped in countless ways. We thank especially the students in our sociology of women and women's studies classes, who have contributed to the development of this book by their critical responses to articles. The following reviewers read the manuscript and improved it by their expert and generous comments:

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Finally, we wish all to know that we are full co-editors. Our names are in alphabetical order.

Laurel Richardson  
Verta Taylor

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# PART ONE

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## Learning Sex and Gender

Everyone is born into a *culture*—a set of *shared ideas* about the nature of reality, the nature of right and wrong, *evaluation of what is good and desirable*, and the nature of the good and desirable versus the bad and nondesirable. These ideas are manifested in behaviors and artifacts. As totally dependent infants we are *socialized*—taught the rules, roles, and relationships of the social world we will inherit. We exchange our infant hedonism for the love, protection, and attention of others; in the process we learn to think, act, and feel as we are “supposed to.”

One of the earliest and most deep-seated ideas to which we are socialized is that of gender identity: the *idea* that “I am a boy” or “I am a girl.” Because the culture, moreover, has strong ideas about what boys are like and what girls are like, we learn to identify our gender identity (our “boyness” or “girlness”) with behaviors and attitudes that are sex-assigned in our culture. Thus, for example, a girl who plays with dolls is viewed as behaving in an appropriate and “feminine” manner and a boy who plays with trucks as appropriately “masculine.” Sometimes consciously and sometimes nonconsciously, children are categorized, differentially responded to and regarded, and encouraged to adopt behaviors and attitudes on the basis of their sex. We raise, in effect, two different kinds of children: boys and girls.

Parents (or surrogate parents) are strong socializing influences in that they provide the first and most deeply experienced socialization experiences. Despite claims to the contrary, parents treat their infant boys and girls differently. Boys have “boy names,” “boy toys,” “boy room decor,” and are played with in more “boylike” ways than girls. Even if parents monitor their actions in the hope of preventing sexism from affecting their child, their endeavors will not succeed, because *other* socializing influences bear down on the child.

One of the primary socializing influences is the *language* we acquire. In learning to talk we acquire the thought patterns and communication styles of our culture. Those patterns and styles perpetuate and reinforce differentiation by sex and sex stereotyping. They are *unavoidable*. Embedded in the language are such ideas as “women are adjuncts to men” (e.g., the use of the generic “man” or “he”); women’s aspirations are and should be different from men’s (e.g., “The secretary . . . *she*,” “the pilot . . . *he*”); women remain immature and incompetent throughout adult life (e.g., “The girls [office staff] have gone to lunch”); women are defined in terms of their sexual desirability (to men) whereas men are defined in terms of their sexual prowess. (Contrast the meanings of the supposedly equivalent words *spinster* and *bachelor*, *mistress* and *master*, *courtesan* and *courtier*, etc.) As long as we speak the language we have acquired, we are not only speaking but also thinking in sex-stereotyping ways.

As our society becomes more complex, increasingly the mass media have become centralized agents for the transmission of cultural beliefs. The media present sex stereotypes in their purest and

simplest forms. Children spend more time watching television than they spend in school or interacting with their parents and peers. Moreover, children tend to *believe* that what they see on television is an accurate representation of the way the world is and *should* be organized. Although the impact is not so great, other forms of mass media—comics, newspapers, advertisements, movies, music—reiterate the theme that (white middle-class) males are powerful and prestigious (and should be), and women are subordinate and without esteem.

The socialization effected by the family and by language (including the mass media) is supplemented by the educational system. Educational institutions are formally charged with teaching the young. While teaching them reading, writing, and arithmetic, however, the schools also imbue them with sexist values. They do so through the pattern of staffing (male principals and custodians, female teachers and food servers), the curriculum materials, the sex segregation of sports and activities, and differential *expectations* of boys and girls. No child can avoid this socialization experience.

Through powerful social institutions, then, children learn a culture. The culture they learn is one that views malehood as superior to femalehood; it is a system that differentially assigns behaviors and attitudes to males and females.

Socialization—whether through the home, the school, language, or the mass media—creates and sustains gender differences. Boys are taught that they will inherit the privileges and prestige of manhood, and girls are taught that they are less socially valuable than boys. Both are expected to view their status as right, moral, and appropriate. Moreover, socialization never ends. As adults we continue to be resocialized by the books we read, the movies we see, and the people we spend time with.

The readings selected for this section, “Learning Sex and Gender,” illustrate and explain different aspects of the socialization process and provide the reader with conceptual frameworks and perspectives for understanding the implications of gender.

## S E C T I O N O N E

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# Language and Images

Language—both verbal and nonverbal—affects the way we view ourselves and our relationships, and reflects the values of a society. Our language teaches that males and male-associated behaviors, attitudes, and goals are more important and more valuable than females and female-associated behaviors, traits, and goals.

In the first selection, “Gender Stereotyping in the English Language,” Laurel Richardson describes six major ways in which the English language perpetuates differential expectations of males and females. As we speak the language and hear it spoken, we unwittingly reinforce in ourselves gender stereotyping. Mary Brown Parlee, in “Conversational Politics,” reviews some of the research on the ways in which power differences affect speech styles and conversational interactions between males and females.

Embedded in our language are ideas about beauty and sexuality. In many societies, male standards of beauty and eroticism require the physical mutilation of women. In “Gynocide: Chinese Foot-

binding” Andrea Dworkin discusses a brutal form of mutilation that affected millions of Chinese women: the binding of a little girl’s feet to force them into the tiny “lotus” shape erotically desired by men. Susan Squire in “Is the Binge-Purge Cycle Catching?” describes a dangerous practice in the United States which many young women have also adopted in order to meet idealized standards of beauty.

We cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of language, both verbal and nonverbal. We are continuously exposed to ideas and images of women as subordinate to men. Moreover, since the language we have acquired and the images we use are so deep-rooted and so omnipresent, it is very difficult for us to break from them, to see and describe the world and our experiences in nonsexist ways. The power to define—to decide whether, for example, a woman supervisor is “pushy” or “assertive,” “energetic” or “a rate-buster,” “cool headed” or “frigid”—has a major influence on our perception of ourselves and of others.



