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## THE ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THE SEXES

ERVING GOFFMAN

### 1.

In modern industrial society, as apparently in all others, sex is at the base of a fundamental code in accordance with which social interactions and social structures are built up, a code which also establishes the conceptions individuals have concerning their fundamental human nature. This is an oft stated proposition, but until recently its awesomely ramified significance escaped us. The traditional sociological position that sex is “learned, diffuse, role behavior” — fair enough in itself — seemed to have inoculated previous generations of social scientists against understanding instead of allowing the disease to spread. More even than in the matter of social class, these students simply acted like everyone else, blindly supporting in their personal conduct exactly what some at least should have been studying. As usual in recent years, we have had to rely on the discontented to remind us of our subject matter.

It is these issues I want to try to approach, doing so from the perspective of social situations and the public order sustained within them. (I define a social situation as a physical arena anywhere within which an entering person finds himself exposed to the immediate presence of one or more others; and a gathering, all persons present, even if only bound together by the norms of civil inattention, or less still, mutual vulnerability.)

### 2.

Women do and men don't gestate, breast-feed infants, and menstruate as a part of their biological character. So, too, women on the whole are smaller and lighter boned and muscled than are men. For these physical facts of life to have no appreciable social consequence would take a little organizing, but, at least by modern standards, not much. Industrial society can absorb new ethnic groups bearing raw cultural differences, a year or so of isolating military service for young men, vast differences in educational level, business and employment cycles, the wartime absence of its adult males every genera-

tion, appreciable annual vacations, and countless other embarrassments to orderliness. That our form of social organization has any necessary features is, I take it, rather questionable. More to the point, for these very slight biological differences – compared to all other differences – to be identified as the grounds for the kind of social consequences felt to follow understandably from them requires a vast, integrated body of social beliefs and practices, sufficiently cohesive and all-embracing to warrant for its analysis the resurrection of unfashionable functional paradigms. (Perhaps traditional Durkheimian notions work here because in this business we are all priests or nuns and need but be together and a hallowed ground for worship comes to hand.) It is not, then, the social consequences of innate sex differences that must be explained, but the way in which these differences were (and are) put forward as a warrant for our social arrangements, and, most important of all, the way in which the institutional workings of society ensured that this accounting would seem sound. (Indeed, one might argue that the chief consequence of the women's movement is not the direct improvement of the lot of women but the weakening of the doctrinal beliefs that heretofore have underpinned the sexual division of deserts and labor.) In all, one is faced with what might be thought of as “institutional reflexivity” – a newish phrase for an old social anthropological doctrine.

### 3.

In all societies, all infants at birth are placed in one or in the other of two *sex classes*, the placement accomplished by inspection of the infant's naked person, specifically its genitalia, these being visibly dimorphic—a placement practice not dissimilar to that employed in regard to domestic animals. This placement by physical configuration allows a sex-linked label of identification. (In English, for example, man-woman, male-female, boy-girl, he-she.) The sorting is confirmed at various stages of the individual's growth by still other biological signs, some recognized in the common lore, some (at least in modern society) an elaboration of science, as described, for example, in chromosomal, gonadal, and hormonal findings. In any case, sex-class placement is almost without exception exhaustive of the population and life-long,<sup>1</sup> providing an exemplary instance, if not a prototype, of social classification. Further, in modern society we feel that male-female is one social division that works in full and realistic harmony with our “biological inheritance” and is something which can never be denied, a unique agreement between the immediate understanding of the man in the street and the findings in laboratories. (Thus the layman may be willing to grant Margaret Mead's famous argument about temperament being culturally, not biologically, determined, and moreover that women can quite competently function as dentists,

even as firemen, and still further, that [in English] literary bias is present in the convention which establishes “he” before “she”, “man” before “woman,” “his” before “hers,” in phrases which couple the two, allows “man” to stand for humankind, and employs “his” as the proper relative pronoun for semi-indefinite terms such as “individual,” male designations clearly being the “unmarked” form; but in making these concessions, he, like Margaret Mead [and myself apparently], sees no reason to deny that the terms “he” and “she” are still entirely adequate as designations of the individuals under discussion.) It should be repeated, then, that by the term “sex-class” I mean to use a category that is purely sociological, that draws on that discipline alone and not on the biological sciences.

In all societies, initial sex-class placement stands at the beginning of a sustained sorting process whereby members of the two classes are subject to differential socialization. From the start, persons who are sorted into the male class and persons who are sorted into the other are given different treatment, acquire different experience, enjoy and suffer different expectations. In response there is objectively overlaid on a biological grid—extending it, neglecting it, countering it—a sex-class-specific way of appearing, acting, feeling. Every society elaborates sex-class in this way, although every society does this after its own fashion. Viewed by the student as a way of characterizing an individual, this complex can be called *gender*; viewed as a way of characterizing a society, it can be called *sexual subculture*. Observe that although gender is almost wholly a social, not biological, consequence of the workings of society, these consequences are objective. An entire population can certainly be unknowing of a particular gender difference, or even falsely opinioned regarding it, yet the difference can still be there, and again, chiefly not because of biology but because of the social experience common to the members of each of the classes.

Every society seems to develop its own conception of what is “essential” to, and characteristic of, the two sex classes, this conception embracing both praised and dispraised attributes. Here are ideals of masculinity and femininity, understandings about ultimate human nature which provide grounds (at least in Western society) for identifying the whole of the person, and provide also a source of accounts that can be drawn on in a million ways to excuse, justify, explain, or disapprove the behavior of an individual or the arrangement under which he lives, these accounts being given both by the individual who is accounted for and by such others as have found reason to account for him. Norms of masculinity and femininity also bear on objective (albeit mainly socially acquired) differences between the sex-classes, but, as suggested, do not coincide with these differences, failing to cover some, misattri-

buting others, and, of course, accounting for a considerable number by means of a questionable doctrine — in our society, a doctrine of biological influence.

Insofar as the individual builds up a sense of who and what he is by referring to his sex class and judging himself in terms of the ideals of masculinity (or femininity), one may speak of *gender identity*. It seems that this source of self-identification is one of the most profound our society provides, perhaps even more so than age-grade, and never is its disturbance or change to be anticipated as an easy matter.

By “sexuality” I will refer to patterns of activity involving sexual stimulation, sexual experience, and the adumbration of inducement to these activities taking a culture-specific form of appearance, dress, style, gesture, and the like. Obviously, much of this sexual practice is sex-class correlated and therefore part of gender. But presumably not all sexuality distinguishes between the sex-classes, being similarly manifest by both. More important, sexuality appears to have a biological life cycle, presumably being very little marked in infancy, very marked in young adulthood, and once again quiescent in later years. This cycle is, of course, manifest through the development and atrophy of the so-called secondary sexual characteristics, of interest here because social ideals regarding masculinity and femininity are often linked to these manifestations. Gender as such, however, has little of a developmental character, except for the pattern in some societies of treating young males as part of the women’s group in certain matters; sex-class linked behavior changes through the life of the individual, and in a sequential, patterned way, but not necessarily in response to some unitary inner development. In any case, it should be perfectly clear that gender and sexuality are not the same thing; by my understanding, at least, a seven-year-old boy who manfully volunteers to help his grandmother with her heavy packages is not trying to make out with her.

It seems that *beliefs* about gender, about masculinity-femininity, and about sexuality are in close interaction with actual gender behavior, and that here popular social science plays a part. Discoveries about gender and about sexuality, whether well or badly grounded, are selectively assimilated to normative understandings regarding masculinity-femininity—sometimes quite rapidly—and thus empowered can have a self-fulfilling effect on objective gender behavior. Nonetheless, *beliefs* about gender, about masculinity-femininity, and about sexuality are themselves not part of gender, except to the extent—which can be considerable—that they are differentially espoused as between the sex classes.

Each of the two sex-classes supports its own patterns of in-class social relationships, giving rise to such infrastructures as old boy nets, buddy formations, female support systems,<sup>2</sup> and the like.

Two concluding comments of caution. In referring to an attribute of gender, it is easy to speak of matters that are “sex-linked” (or “sex-correlated”) in order to avoid the more cumbersome locution, “sex-class linked.” And, of course, it is very natural to speak of “the sexes,” “cross-sex,” “the other sex,” and so forth. And so I shall. But this is a dangerous economy, especially so since such glossing fits perfectly with our cultural stereotypes. One should think of sex as a property of organisms, not as a class of them. Thus “secondary sexual characteristics” are attributes associated with sexuality, but it is misleading to speak of these attributes as sex-linked if, in so doing, one means to imply the existence of a class of persons fundamentally defined and definable by matters biological. As suggested, secondary sexual characteristics are indeed, by and large, linkable to sex-class; but each of the two human categories involved has many non-biological attributes and behavioral practices differentially linked to it, too. Underlying this issue, of course, is an even more troublesome one. Given a definition of a category of persons, in this case sex-class, it would seem that *any* apt label we employ to refer to its members—in this case, “men,” “women,” “male,” “female,” “he,” “she”—can easily come to function as a characterization, symbol, and overall image of the class, a way of constituting one attribute into the jug while other attributes merely fill it.

Second, there is the matter of “traits,” “attributes,” and “practices.” For example, on traditional middle-class playgrounds in America, boys roughhouse more than girls, and roughhousing can be considered as perhaps a practice of the male sex-class. To say here “of the male sex-class” implies that the behavior is somehow not merely encompassed by male bodies severally but also motivated and styled by something from within these several bodies and not, therefore, merely the response of individuals to a formally established ruling. One might want to refer here to a *genderism*, namely, a sex-class linked individual behavioral practice. But take the practice found on school grounds a generation ago of lining up the students outside the doorway in two sex-segregated files before re-entering the school after a recess, presumably so that entrance would be orderly and respectful. Now although such an arrangement certainly “expressed” beliefs about the differences between the sex-classes and was certainly made up of sex-class linked behavior, still, lines formed with one’s sex mates cannot easily be treated as a personally encompassed and generated bit of behavior, a genderism. If anything, what one has here is an institutional genderism, a behavioral property of an organization,

not a person. *Lining up behavior* might be seen as individually encompassed, but as such ceases to be gender specific, being something that the two classes equally engage in. The lines themselves, it might be added, are a simple—nay, geometric—example of *parallel organization*, an arrangement in which similar efforts or services, similar rights or obligations, are organized in a segregated manner. However, as in the case of the parallel organization which occurs with respect to other binary social divisions—white/black, adult/child, officer/enlisted man, etc.—parallel organization based on sex provides a ready base for the elaboration of differential treatment, these adumbrative elaborations to be seen as consonant and suitable given the claimed difference in character between the two categories. Thus, to revert to the simple example, once children are made to form sex-segregated files, it is a simple matter to rule that the female file enters before the male file, presumably because the “gentler” sex should be given preference in the matter of getting out of the raw outdoors first, and both sexes should be given little lessons on proper regard for gender.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.

In almost all known societies it seems that sleeping, child-raising, and (to a lesser degree) eating tend to be centered in small establishments, these functions—especially in modern societies—organized around a married, breeding pair; that broadly speaking the social roles of men and women are markedly differentiated, this, incidentally, giving to women the lesser rank and power, restricting her use of public space, excluding her from warfare and hunting, and often from religious and political office; and that more than the male, the female finds her life centered around household duties. This complex of arrangements is a central theme in human social organization, embarrassing the distinction between savage societies and civilized ones. The reason for these facts would be interesting to know, if, in fact, anyone is ever able to uncover them. (Perhaps a factor is that the segmentation that can be built on sex and procreative lines immensely simplifies social organization.) More interesting still is the ideological use to which these facts have been put. For this patterning in societies in general has allowed us to try to account for what occurs in our own industrial world by referring back to what occurs in small, nonliterate societies—indeed gives us some warrant for using the concept of “a society” in the first place—and from there encourages us to keep on going all the way to nonhuman primates and a fundamentally biological view of human nature. My position will be that the lesson that other societies—let alone other species—teach us has not yet been formulated soundly enough to provide us a warranted text to use for instructional purposes, and I propose to restrict myself to the here and now.

If one thinks of women—as I suppose one should—as just another disadvantaged category of persons in modern society, then comparisons with other such categories recommends itself, along with a statement of where women fit on the scale of being treated unfairly. The answer to the latter question sometimes is: not very far down. Women in American society are more or less equal to men in the question of ethnic and social class; whatever these latter properties confer by way of social gain or loss upon men, they do so, too, upon women. So, too, there is considerable equality between the sexes in regard to inheritance, educational opportunity (at least undergraduate), personal consumption of goods, most rights before the law, and the love and respect of their children. Women are disadvantaged in regard to payment for work and grade of work attained, access to certain occupations and certain credit resources, legal practice with respect to name, claims on use of public streets and places. (Some of these disadvantages diminish in the face of modernization and population control policies.) And it might even be claimed that women are advantaged in certain ways: they have generally enjoyed freedom from military conscription, whole or partial exemption from certain kinds of heavy work, preferential courtesies of various kinds—these, too, perhaps diminishing with increased modernization.

This view of the situation of women has some utility in regard to social policy and political action, but for our purposes is too blunt. (The sociologically interesting thing about a disadvantaged category is not the painfulness of the disadvantage, but the bearing of the social structure on its generation and stability.) The issue, then, is not that women get less, but under what arrangement this occurs and what symbolic reading is given to the arrangement.

Given that a basic unit of our society is the domestic establishment with its nuclear family, ideal or fragmented, the whole embedded in a community somewhat homogeneous with respect to class, color, and ethnicity, and omitting incarcerative institutions, one has reason to distinguish two kinds of disadvantaged categories: those that can and tend to be sequestered off into entire families and neighborhoods and those that do not. Blacks are an example of the first; the physically handicapped, the second. Among those disadvantaged categories which are not segregated, women stand rather apart. Other unsegregated categories, such as the blind, the obese, the ex-mental patient, are scattered somewhat haphazardly throughout the social structure. (Relative concentration may occur in a particular ethnic group, age grade, economic level, or sex class, but incidence is still low.) Women are anything but that: they are allocated distributively to households in the form of female children, and then later, but still distributively, to other households in the



form of wives. In the first, nature averages out the matter between the two sexes; in the second, law and custom allow only one to a household but strongly encourage the presence of that one.

Women as a disadvantaged group are, then, like maids (and like house servants), somewhat cut off ecologically from congress with their kind. Unlike household staff, however, women are also separated from one another by the stake they acquire in the very organization which divides them. For instead of an employer or master, a woman is likely to have (through the course of her life) a father, a husband, and sons. And these males transmit to her enough of what they themselves possess or acquire to give her a vested interest in the corporation. Defined as deeply different from men, each is yet linked to particular men through fundamental social bonds, placing her in a coalition with her menfolk against the whole of the rest of the world, a coalition, incidentally, which leads her to participate together with a connected male in many social situations. For plainly, here the disadvantaged and the advantaged comprise two perfectly divided halves of the whole society, with similarity in expectations organized within sex-class and bondedness organized across the sexes. (A pretty support for this arrangement is “complementary ritual”: a show of affiliation that one spouse extends to a particular female or male will be echoed in what the other spouse displays to the same person; thus the peculiar character of the cross-sex bond can be preserved in the face of third parties.) It is this sort of patterning, as if designed by some juvenile geometer who had read Radcliffe-Brown at too early an age, that presents the sociologically interesting phenomenon—and a remarkable phenomenon it is.

Furthermore, through one ritualized gesture or another, males are very likely to express, albeit fitfully, that they define females as fragile and valuable, to be protected from the harsher things of life and shown both love and respect.<sup>4</sup> Women may be defined as being less than men, but they are nonetheless idealized, mythologized, in a serious way through such values as motherhood, innocence, gentleness, sexual attractiveness, and so forth—a lesser pantheon, perhaps, but a pantheon nonetheless. Moreover, many women—perhaps the vast majority in America even today—are profoundly convinced that however baleful their place in society, the official view concerning the natural characterological differences between themselves and men is correct, eternally and naturally so.

It is these special factors associated with the position of women that make our modern equalitarian world considerably like the most patriarchal you can imagine—a chip off a very old block. And what makes industrial society special is not that our form of economic production little depends on the

natural differences between the sexes—it might be very hard to find a society anywhere at any time that actually did—but rather that some of our citizenry no longer believe that women’s traditional place is a natural expression of their natural capacities. And without that belief, the whole arrangement between the sex-classes ceases to make much sense. I do not claim that skepticism here will fundamentally alter the arrangement between the sexes, only that if the traditional pattern is sustained, it will be sustained less comfortably.

## 5.

I have mentioned the obvious fact that women, unlike other disadvantaged adult groups, are held in high regard. Consider now two basic expressions of this condition: the courtship complex and the courtesy system.

1. In our society courtship tends to occur when potential partners are in their late teens and early twenties, this, incidentally, being a time when, on biological grounds, the female maximally fits commercial ideals regarding sexual attractiveness. The female adorns herself in terms of received notions of sexual attractiveness and makes herself available for review in public, semi-public, and restricted places. Males who are present show broadcast attention to females held to be desirable, and await some fugitive sign that can be taken as encouragement of their interest.<sup>5</sup> Routinely, courtship will mean that a male who was on distant terms comes to be on closer ones, which means that the male’s assessing act—his ogling—constitutes the first move in the courtship process. And also that decorum will play an important role; for both male and female will act as if she is unaware that she has incurred an assessment (and, if favorable, that she has aroused sexual interest) and that she is not to be importuned if she does not respond with an encouraging act, the male presumably suppressing or displacing his desire. This is not to deny that successful suitors are likely to be those males who did not quite restrict their address to decorous distance-keeping.

The strategic advantage of the male in courtship derives from his ability and right to withdraw interest at any point save perhaps the last ones, that of the female from control of access to her favors, such sequential access being in our society expressive evidence of pair formation. (Power is another matter, deriving from extendable rights in property, social class, and so forth.) The advantages here are not quite balanced because the man also defines such access as evidence of his capacity as a male, and so he has reasons to submit to a female’s gatekeeping apart from courtship considerations. (Women get confirmation, too, but the initial show of interest will often do.) But whether the male is interested in courtship or mere seduction, he must pursue the

female with attentions and she has the power to lengthen or shorten the pursuit.

Observe that in traditional terms the female's discretion over bestowal can only remain a right insofar as she is successfully secretive about occasions for its use, or is chary about the numbers whom she so honors and the rapidity with which, in the case of any particular successful candidate, she does so. Traditional logic dictates that she bestow her final favors on only one person, and upon him only in response to his having committed himself to supporting her. This practice in turn permits, or at least is very consonant with, two others.

First, she can allow herself to be assessed in terms of nubility because the period for mate selection is geared into her very temporary qualification in this regard. (Thus the harsh fact that she will for many later years be disqualified, and increasingly so, from what she is supposed to be, will be correlated with, and mitigated by, her withdrawal from competition into domesticity, where presumably she will be able to enjoy what she has been able to win during her biologically supported period at play in the courtship game.<sup>6</sup>)

Second, one traditional means of encouraging females to keep up the side and not bestow sexual favors too easily, which if done generally might debase the coin, was to define sexuality as dirty and bad, something that is contaminating, something only men want, something, therefore, that destroys good women and creates loose ones. However, the contract to mate was sealed by the female bestowing access rights, a frame for the act which hopefully transformed it into evidence of relationship formation, not easy virtue. She became a mate, not a lay, someone intrinsically pure who had proven vulnerable to but one special man, and this—he could think—because of his own special worthiness. The affirmation of masculinity the male thereby obtained was patently paradoxical; only virginally spirited women desirable as mates could bestow it, but the gift tended to destroy what had been given. In any case, we have here the traditional, standard formula of the respectable classes: he obtains exclusive rights of access and she gets a social place. Of course, for increasing numbers of our population sexual access has ceased to function in quite this way. Sexual license before marriage with someone not destined to be one's spouse is becoming quite routine, and what betrothal brings in these cases, ideally, is exclusive claim, not first claim.

As oft remarked, the courtship system implies that the two sexes will be differently situated in regard to norms of sexual attractiveness. On the face of it, the job of the male is to be attracted and of the female to attract, and

similarly, on the face of it, in deciding whom to encourage from among those men who have shown interest, she is likely—it is said—to take into consideration broader matters than mere good looks and youthfulness. As already suggested, the implication is that she (more than he) will be committed to standards of appearance from which age will soon and increasingly cause her to deviate. Note that more so than with men, what a woman inherits socially from her parents cannot prevent her social position becoming precarious should she remain unmarried, in consequence of which she has an added reason to treat unsuitable suitors more and more seriously.

2. As courtship practices provide one expression of the high value placed on women, so the courtesy system provides another. In terms of what interpersonal rituals convey, the belief (in Western society) is that women are precious, ornamental, and fragile, uninstructed in, and ill-suited for, anything requiring muscular exertion or mechanical or electrical training or physical risk; further, that they are easily subject to contamination and defilement and to blanching when faced with harsh words and cruel facts, being labile as well as delicate. It follows, then, that males will have the obligation of stepping in and helping (or protecting) whenever it appears that a female is threatened or taxed in any way, shielding her from gory, grisly sights, from squeamish-making things like spiders and worms, from noise, and from rain, wind, cold, and other inclemencies. Intercession can be extended even to the point of mediating her contacts with officials, strangers, and service personnel. And some of these obligations on the part of the male will extend not merely to females to whom he is personally related, but to any female who comes in sight, that is, to any female in the gathering in which he happens to find himself, especially if it appears that she is otherwise unattended by a male. This extension to the category as a whole is nicely confirmed by the fact that the manner in which a male proffers a courtesy to his wife can take an impersonal form, one perfectly suited to be shown to any female, and by the fact that minor courtesies can provide males with a defensible reason for involving themselves with attended females not known to them, as when a man momentarily turns from his course of action to light a woman's cigarette, exhibiting through a self-effacing manner that he has no designs on her time or attention and is not to be seen as ambitious, even by her male companion. Another confirmation, pretty as an example but ugly as a fact, is reported in the rape literature;<sup>7</sup> faced with forced attentions from strangers or persons known, and with the failure of other dissuasions, victims tend to beg and plead for mercy, employing the term "please"—a term that presupposes a claim of some sort that one's plight is to be given consideration, a claim that any woman ought to be able to invoke in regard to any man.

3. There appears to be a fundamental interweaving in our public life of courtship and courtesy, with consequences that are important. Obviously the obligation of a male to offer help of one kind and another, to volunteer his own effort as a substitute for that of any neighboring female, is not merely an obligation but also a license. For he can use this obligation selectively as a cover under which to focus his attentions upon attractive women, thus considerably increasing the means available to him to press his pursuit beyond what mere co-participation in a gathering might otherwise provide; for example, she may find herself obliged to convey gratitude, signs of relief, and so forth. He thus facilitates and encourages the female's show of interest in him, should she be of that mind, and may even oblige her somewhat in that direction. Note, courtesies shown by males to desirable females may be proffered with no great expectation or hope that something beyond the contact can come of them; the interaction itself, laced with such joking allusions as the male can muster, provides him a small nibble of sexuality and a small confirmation of his masculinity.

One consequence of this link between courtship and courtesy is the provision of a benign basis for managing those social contacts which might otherwise be competitive or even hostile. Another consequence is that although the standard courtesies accorded females by males tend to be applied fully and with pleasure to the young and pretty, they tend to be applied with increasing reservation as these two properties are wanting. The old and the ugly are thus continuously threatened with not being treated in a manner as befits the human nature their sex-class is supposed to have conferred upon them. And they will have cause to respond by being very careful not to press their case, or demand or intrude to the point where such niceties as are shown them might be withdrawn. (Thus it turns out that "well-dressed," young, attractive females must be very circumspect in public places for one reason, the unattractive for another.)

Another consequence of the mingling of courtship and courtesy bears on the manner in which a female is constrained to conduct herself in mixed gatherings. By acting in a retiring manner, by projecting shyness, reserve, and a display of frailty, fear, and incompetence, she can constitute herself into the sort of object to which a male can properly extend his helping hand, suppressing coarseness in his speech and behavior while doing so. But observe that when the gathering contains men other than her husband, another reason encourages her in this unforthcomingness. Given that males will be watching for encouragement, looking to some lapse in the female's wonted reserve as a sign of this, it follows that any forwardness on her part, any initiative, insobriety, aggressiveness, or direction-giving, can be seen as sexually inviting,

a sign, in short, of accessibility.<sup>8</sup> Thus, specific legal or moral sanctions are not ordinarily needed to restrain women in public, only self-interest, but this self-regulation can be seen as a functional consequence, a by-product, of the interworkings of other social definitions.

## 6.

Now the heart of the matter. It is common to conceive of the differences between the sexes as showing up against the demands and constraints of the environment, the environment itself being taken as a harsh given, present before the matter of sex differences arose. Or, differently put, that sex differences are a biological given, an external constraint upon any form of social organization that humans might devise. There is another way of viewing the question, however. Speculatively one can reverse the equation and ask what could be sought out from the environment or put into it so that such innate differences between the sexes as there are could count—in fact or in appearance—for something. The issue, then, is institutional reflexivity. Consider some examples.

1. Clearly on biological grounds, mother is in a position to breastfeed baby and father is not. Given that recalcitrant fact, it is meet that father temporarily but exclusively takes on such tasks as may involve considerable separation from the household. But this quite temporary biologically-grounded constraint turns out to be extended culturally. A whole range of domestic duties come (for whatever reason) to be defined as inappropriate for a male to perform; and a whole range of occupations away from the household come to be defined as inappropriate for the female. Given these social definitions, coalition formation is a natural response to the harsh facts of the world, for only in this way will one be able to acquire what one needs and yet not have to engage in labor that is unsuitable for someone of one's kind. Nor is couple formation required only because of gender constraints on task performance. In public life in general women will find that there are things that should be done for them, and men will find that there are things that they should be doing for others, so once again they find they need each other. (So that just as a man may take a wife to save himself from labor that is uncongenial to him, so she can seek him so as to have the company she needs if she is to make full use of public places.) Thus, the human nature imputed to the male causes him to be dependent on a female connection, and the reciprocal condition prevails for women. Who a male finds he needs if he is to act according to his nature is just who needs him so that she can act according to hers. Persons as such do not need one another in these ways, they do so only as gender-based identities.

2. Consider the household as a socialization depot. Take as a paradigm a middle-class pair of cross-sexed sibs. The home training of the two sexes will differ, beginning to orient the girl to taking a domestic, supportive role, and the boy to a more widely based competitive one. This difference in orientation will be superimposed on a fundamental quality in many matters that are felt to count. So from the start, then, there will be two basic principles to appeal to in making claims and warranting allocations. One is the equality of sibs and beyond this of participating members—the share and share alike theme realized in its strongest form in many wills and in its most prevalent form in turn-taking systems. The other is the accounting by sex, as when the larger portion at mealtime is given to the male “because he’s a boy” or the softer of two beds is allocated to the female “because she’s a girl,” or a male is accorded harsher negative sanctions than a female because his is the coarser nature and it will take more to get through to him. And these accountings by appeal to gender will never cease to be used as a handy device to rationalize an allocation whose basis is otherwise determined, to exclude a basis of allocation that might cause disgruntlement, and, even more, to explain away various failures to live up to expectations.

All of this is perfectly well known in principle, although not adequately explored in detail. What is not well appreciated is that differently sexed children coming under the jurisdiction of the same parental authority and living much of their early lives in one another’s presence in the same set of rooms produce thereby an ideal setting for role differentiation. For family life ensures that most of what each sex does is done in the full sight of the other sex and with full mutual appreciation of the differential treatment that obtains. Thus, whatever the economic or class level and however well or badly off a female sees she is when compared to children in other families, she can hardly fail to see that her male sib, equal to her when compared to children in other families and often equal, too, in regard to ultimate claims upon the family resources, is yet judged differently and accorded different treatment from herself by their parents. So, too, a male sib. Thus from the beginning males and females acquire a way of judging deserts and treatment that muffles (by cross-cutting) differences in class and economic power. However superior the social position of a family may be, its female children will be able to learn that they are different from (and somewhat subordinate to) males; and however inferior the social position of a family may be, its male children will be able to learn that they are different from (and somewhat superordinate to) females. It is as if society planted a brother with sisters so women could from the beginning learn their place, and a sister with brothers so men could learn their place. Each sex becomes a training device for the other, a device that is brought right into the house; and what will serve to

structure wider social life is thus given its shape and its impetus in a very small and very cozy circle. And it also follows that the deepest sense of what one is—one's gender identity—is something that is given its initial character from ingredients that do not bear on ethnicity or socio-economic stratification, in consequence of which we all acquire a deep capacity to shield ourselves from what we gain and lose by virtue of our placement in the overall social hierarchy. Brothers will have a way of defining themselves in terms of their differences from persons like their sisters, and sisters will have a way of defining themselves in terms of their differences from persons like their brothers, in both cases turning perception away from how it is the sibs in one family are socially situated in a fundamentally different way from the sibs of another family. Gender, not religion, is the opiate of the masses. In any case, we have here a remarkable organizational device. A man may spend his day suffering under those who have power over him, suffer this situation at almost any level of society, and yet on returning home each night regain a sphere in which he dominates. And wherever he goes beyond the household, women can be there to prop up his show of competence. It is not merely that your male executive has a female secretary, but (as now often remarked) his drop-out son who moves up the hierarchy of alternative publishing or protest politics will have female help, too; and had he been disaffected enough to join a rural commune, an appropriate division of labor would have awaited him. And should we leave the real world for something set up as its fictional alternative, a science fiction cosmos, we would find that here, too, males engage in the executive action and have females to help out in the manner of their sex. Wherever the male goes, apparently, he can carry a sexual division of labor with him.

3. In modern times, mating pairs appear naked to each other and are even likely to employ a bathroom at the same time. But beyond this, the mature genitalia of one sex is not supposed to be exposed to the eyes of the other sex. Furthermore, although it is recognized that persons of both sexes are somewhat similar in the question of waste products and their elimination, the environment in which females engage in this act ought (we in America apparently feel) to be more refined, extensive, and elaborate than that required for males. Presumably out of consideration for the arrangement between the sexes in general, and the female sex-class in particular, it has come to pass, then, that almost all places of work and congregation are equipped with two sets of toilet facilities (a case of parallel organization), differentiated with respect to quality. A case of separate and unequal. Therefore, in very nearly every industrial and commercial establishment, women will be able to break off being exposed to males and their company and retire into an all-female enclave, often in the company of a female friend,



and there spend time in toiletry, a longer time presumably, and perhaps more frequently, than males spend in their segregated toilet, and under more genteel environmental conditions. A resting room that is sex-segregated (as many are) may extend this divided realm. There is thus established a sort of with-then-apart rhythm, with a period of the sexes being immersed together followed by a short period of separation, and so on. (Bars, gyms, locker rooms, pool rooms, etc., accomplish the same sort of periodic segregation, but from the male side, the difference being that whereas female redoubts tend to be furnished more genteely than the surrounding scene, male redoubts [at least in the U.S.] are often furnished less prepossessingly than the surround.) This same pattern seems to be extended outward from toilets and resting rooms to larger domains. Large stores have floors which merge the sexes but also smaller zones which offer one-sex merchandise patronized very largely by that sex alone. Schools provide coeducational classes, punctuated by gym, sports, and a few other activities that are sex-segregated.<sup>9</sup>

All in all, then, one does not so much deal with segregation as with segregative punctuation of the day's round, this ensuring that subcultural differences can be reaffirmed and reestablished in the face of contact between the sexes. It is as if the joining of the sexes were tolerable providing periodic escape is possible; it is as if equality and sameness were a masquerade that was to be periodically dropped. And all of this is done in the name of nicety, of civilization, of the respect owed females, or of the "natural" need of men to be by themselves. Observe that since by and large public places are designed for males (the big exception being large department stores), female facilities have had to be added to ones already established. Predictably, it has been an argument against hiring females that an extra complement of toilet facilities would be necessary and is not available.

Now clearly, if ogling and sexual access is to play the role it does in pair formation in our society, then sequestering of toilet functions by sex would seem to be indicated. And even more clearly, what is thus sequestered is a biological matter in terms of which the sex-classes biologically and markedly differ. But the sequestering arrangement as such cannot be tied to matters biological, only to folk conceptions about biological matters. The *functioning* of sex-differentiated organs is involved, but there is nothing in this functioning that *biologically* recommends segregation; *that* arrangement is totally a cultural matter. And what one has is a case of institutional reflexivity: toilet segregation is presented as a natural consequence of the difference between the sex-classes, when in fact it is rather a means of honoring, if not producing, this difference.

4. Consider now selective job placement. Traditionally in industrial society women have gravitated to, or have been gravitated to, jobs which sustain the note established for them in households—the garment industry, domestic labor, commercial cleaning, and personal servicing such as teaching, innkeeping, nursing, food handling.<sup>10</sup> In these latter scenes, presumably, it will be easy for us to fall into treating the server as someone to help us in a semi-mothering way, not someone to subordinate coldly or be subordinated by. In service matters closely associated with the body and the self, we are thus able to play down the harshness that male servers might be thought to bring.

Women, especially young, middle-class ones, have also, of course, been much employed in clerical and secretarial labor, which work is often defined as a dead-end job to be filled by someone who dresses well and doesn't expect or want to make a career out of the labor. Presumably secretaries are merely marking time until marriage, preferably in a place where opportunity to "meet" men is to be found. In any case, the age and sex difference between secretary and employer allows for some styling in avuncular terms. By removing the relationship from the strict world of business, the superior can suffer being intimately viewed by a subordinate without feeling that he has lost rank by the association. He can also make minor demands beyond the core of the contract, expecting to be seen as someone whose needs should be attended to however varied these might be—as a child would be attended by a mother. In return he can extend family feeling, using a personal term of address (of course asymmetrically), please-and-thank-you brackets around each of the minor discrete services called for, and gallantry in the matter of opening doors and moving heavy typewriters. He can also allow her to use the telephone for personal calls and can respond to pleas for special time off to accomplish the business of her sex.

So, too, one finds in jobs where women "meet the public"—ticket-takers, receptionists, airhostesses, salespersons—that standards of youthful "attractiveness" apply in employee selection. Which practice is, of course, even more marked in selecting women for advertising displays and the dramatic arts. The consequence is that when a male has business contacts with a female, she is more than otherwise likely to be someone whom he might take pleasure in associating with. Again, the courtesy he here extends and receives can carry a dash of sexual interest. (It appears that the higher the male reaches in the hierarchies within business, government, or the professions, the classier will be the women he is required to have incidental dealings with, a sign and symbol of success.)

Finally, note that in almost all work settings established as places for

thoroughly masculine labor, one or two women can be found engaged in some sort of ancillary work. It turns out, then, that there are few social settings where males will not be in a position to enact courtesies due to the female sex.

In all, then, one can see that selective employment comes to ensure that males are likely to find themselves rather frequently in the presence of females, and that these women will not only tend to allow a personalization of the contact, but will be relatively young and attractive beyond what random selection ought to allow. In that sense, the world that men are in is a social construct, drawing them daily from their conjugal milieu to what appear to be all-male settings; but these environments turn out to be strategically stocked with relatively attractive females, there to serve in a specialized way as passing targets for sexually allusive banter and for diffuse considerateness extended in both directions. The principle is that of less for more, the effect is that of establishing the world beyond the household as a faintly red-light district where men can easily find and safely enjoy interactional favors. Observe that the more a male contents himself with gender pleasantries—systematically available yet intermittent and brief—the more widely can a preferential category of females be shared by males in general.<sup>11</sup> (Indeed, the traditional dating game can be seen not merely as a means of getting the sexes paired, but as a means of giving a large number of men a little of the company of exemplary women.)

5. Among all the means by which differentiation along sex-class lines is fostered in modern society, one stands out as having a special and an especially powerful influence: I refer to our *identification system*, this involving two related matters, our means of discovering “who” it is that has come into our ken, that is, our placement practices, and our means of labeling what it is we have thus placed.

On the placement side, it is clear that the appearance established as appropriate to the two sexes allows for sex typing at a distance. Although recently this arrangement has developed some potential for error, still the system is remarkably effective at any angle and from almost any distance, saving only that viewing be close enough to allow perception of a figure. Effectiveness of placement by sight is matched by sound; tone of voice alone—as on the phone—is sufficient by and large for sexual identification. Indeed, handwriting is effective, too, although perhaps not as fully as appearance and voice. (Only appreciable differences in age are as effectively betrayed through all three channels; race in America is conveyed through sight and, by and large, through voice but not through handwriting.)

On the naming side, we have a system of terms including proper personal names, titles, and pronouns. These devices are used for giving deference (whether respect, distance, or affection), for specifying who we are addressing or who among those present we are referring to, and for making attributions in written and spoken statements. And in European languages, by and large, except for second-person pronouns, these naming practices inform at least about sex-class, this often being the only matter they do inform about.

Now our placement practices and naming practices, taken together as a single system, serve to define who we are to have dealings with and enable these dealings to proceed; and both sets of practices very strongly encourage categorization along sex-class lines. Right from the very start of an interaction, then, there is a bias in favor of formulating matters in sex-relevant terms, such that sex-class provides the overall profile or container, and particularizing properties are then attributed to the outline by way of specification. This is not a small bias. And note that this identification-naming system is overwhelmingly accounted for by the doctrine that consequent discriminations are only natural, something not to be seen as a product of personal or social engineering but rather as a natural phenomenon.

## 7.

I have touched on five examples of institutional reflexivity, five features of social organization which have the effect of confirming our gender stereotypes and the prevailing arrangement between the sexes: the sex-class division of labor, siblings as socializers, toilet practices, looks and job selection, our identification system. In all of this an underlying issue has been the biological differences between the sexes. It is that issue to which I return now, especially in the matter of differences in size, strength, and combat potential.

My argument throughout has been the now standard one that the physical differences between the sexes are in themselves very little relevant to the human capacities required in most of our undertakings. The interesting question then becomes: How in modern society do such irrelevant biological differences between the sexes come to seem of vast social importance? How, without biological warrant, are these biological differences elaborated socially? Again the answer will argue for institutional reflexivity.

1. Clearly if hand-to-hand combat could be arranged on every occasion of human contact, the biological difference between the sex-classes would signify, for in such combat the weaker would have to extend himself to the full to try for a win or to flee for safety, and overwhelmingly in cross-sex contacts,

the himself would be a herself. In much of adult life, these trials are ruled out. But they are not ruled out as a source of guiding imagery. Among young males—and males only—training and practice in boxing and wrestling are fairly widespread, if spread shallow. Thus, instead of spluttering on the occasion of a physical challenge, males learn to do something in a somewhat concerted fashion. In any case, one has here a key source of metaphor, the dueling or punch-out format. Men, even middle-class ones, hold themselves ready to have to defend themselves physically (as a defense of self) or attack another (as a defense of loved ones, property, or principles). For middle-class males, at least, this does not mean actual combat, merely a sizing up of situations in terms of this possibility. Before a male becomes openly aggressive, he thus judges the possible outcome in terms of “having it out” and whether he could “handle” the other. (Of course, he will also be concerned about creating a “scene,” with its attendant ill fame, entanglements with the police and the courts, cosmetic disarray, etc.) This judgment produces a great deal of circumspection and carefulness and often the erroneous outward appearance that fighting has ceased to be a relevant possibility. But, in fact, the issue is not that the model has ceased to function as a guide, rather that it functions very well.

Corresponding to the role of combat as a source of imagery and style in dealings between men, one finds an image of sexual imposition or force in dealings across sexes. Relationship formation is seen to come from aggressive initiatory activity on the part of males, a breaking down of boundaries and barriers, a pursuit, a pressing of one's suit. (Indeed, fiction affirms a remarkable version—a mythic encapsulation, as it were—portrayed through hands that start by unsuccessfully fighting off a rapist and end by caressing a lover; and it turns out that some actual rapists look, albeit unsuccessfully, to have the fantasy realized.<sup>12</sup>) Thus, the courtship scene, held to express the ultimate nature of the beasts, turns out to be one of the few available contexts in which myths concerning the differences between the sexes can be realized. Basic social facts, then, are not so much carried into this realm as carried out of it.

2. Consider now dimorphism and social situations. Males, being bigger and stronger than females, can, if of a mind, help women out in social situations in regard, say, to things that are heavy or out of reach. Males on the same count can physically threaten present females, as well as come to their aid should others threaten. In all of this, males will have an opportunity of doing and females of showing respect, if not gratitude, for what is done. But observe how social practice has made it possible for men and women to stage these self-confirming scenes.

Men, of course, are trained from childhood in outdoor competencies, mechanical, electrical, automotive, and so forth, just as they very often are given some rudimentary practice in the arts of self-defense. They come then, to social situations with these advantages, just as women come to social situations without them.

Differential size and strength similarly has a social element. Although men on the whole are larger and stronger than women, there is appreciable overlap in the two normal curves. Thus, if present conventions were reversed and if care were taken, a very evident number of couples could contain males shorter than or equal in height to their female companions. But in fact, selective mating ensures that with almost no exceptions husbands are bigger than wives and boyfriends are bigger than their girlfriends. (One has here a prime example of a norm sustained without official or specific social sanction, diffuse unsatisfactory consequences apparently serving to ensure utter uniformity.) Now since our Western society is very considerably organized in terms of couples, in the sense that the two members are often to be found in each other's company (most constantly, of course, in the recreational and domestic spheres), it will be that displays by men to women of physical help and physical threat will be widely possible. The marital bond—whatever else it is—can be seen as having the consequence of more or less permanently attaching an audience directly to each performer, so that wherever the male or female goes, an appropriate other will be alongside to reciprocate the enactment of gender expressions. Pair formation creates a mutually captive audience. Nor does the matter stop with the marital and dating pair. Even temporary clusters at sociable occasions are likely to be recruited so once again the male is in a position to do his show without being embarrassed by the presence of a female who (it appears) is physically endowed to do it better. Observe, too, that the customary age differential between the pairing sexes ensures that, by and large, the male will be more experienced and moneyed than the female, this, too, supporting the show of control he exhibits in social situations.

In sum, early training reinforces what selection by age and height differential establishes, namely, social situations in which men and women can effectively play out the differential human nature claimed for them. Thus, the image can be sustained that all women are muscularly less developed than all men in all respects, a binary division alien to the biological facts; for in fact, physical forcefulness involves several variables which are incompletely correlated, and a line cleanly dividing the two sex-classes cannot be drawn. Yet the patterning of sex-class behavior is such that puny men and robust women mainly suffer the assaultive contingencies associated with their sex-class, not their size.

3. An important feature of the life of the young, especially the male young, in our society is competitive sports and games. This organized vying is presented by adults as a desirable thing, a scene in which youths can work off their animal energies, learn fairness, perseverance, and team spirit, obtain exercise, and sharpen a desire to fight against the odds for a win; in short, a training ground for the game of life. (Thus when boys are given instruction in fighting, the teaching tends to be in a fair contest frame, with rules and referees to see that nothing gets out of hand.) But indeed, one might just as well see these vying frames as the only discoverable way of establishing the world as we claim it to be. So, one could argue, it is not that sports are but another expression of our human (specifically male) nature, but rather that sports are the only expression of male human nature—an arrangement specifically designed to allow males to manifest the qualities claimed as basic to them: strengths of various kinds, stamina, endurance, and the like. In consequence of this early training in sports, individuals can carry through life a framework of arrangement and response, a referencing system, which provides evidence, perhaps *the* evidence, of our having a certain nature. Adult spectator sports, live and transmitted, ensure a continuous reminder of this contesting perspective.

There is an important point to be made about contests. Fairness is achieved not only by obedience to the rules of the sport, but also by selecting evenly matched opponents or by handicapping superior ones. This ensures that the outcome will be unpredictable and therefore suspenseful. But for an understanding of biological differences, the issue is that even in the put-together world of sports, only very careful selectivity provides the circumstances in which marginal effort will be determinative, when, that is, the full exercise of physical skill, endurance, and strength is necessary. And in sports, circumstances are also presented in which weight, reach, and height are crucial. *It is here, then, that the sort of biological differences that exist between males and females would tell.* But for these differences to tell, these are the arrangements that must be established. Now what one finds increasingly in civil life is that extremely few jobs call on this marginal performance, this stretching of physical capacity. Yet it is just this marginal difference between the strong and the weak, the sturdy and the slight, the tall and the short, that is employed in the doctrine we have concerning work and sex.

4. Another matter to examine is playfulness. In many social circles, the occasions when physical coercion is threatened or applied may be rare indeed. But although the social environment is thus uncooperative in allowing for a show of gender, forcing the use of sporting scenes designed for the purpose, the ad hoc use of playfulness can compensate, ensuring that opportunity for

mock moves of physical dominance will abound. Thus between males one finds various forms of horseplay—showing, pushing, punching, withholding—along with mock contests such as Indian wrestling, spur of the moment races, hand-squeeze trials, and the like. Across sex, males engage in lift-off bear hugs, mock chasing after, coercive holding in one position, grasping of the two small wrists in one big hand, playful rocking of the boat, dunking, throwing or pushing into the water, spraying with water, making as if to push off a cliff, throwing small stones at the body, approaching with snake, dead rat, squid, and other loathsome objects, threatening with electrical shocks of an order they themselves can bear, and other delights.<sup>13</sup> Observe that by unseriously introducing just those threats and pains that he might protect a woman from, a male can encourage her to provide a full-voiced rendition of the plight to which her sex is presumably prone. And, of course, she herself can create the unserious circumstances in which her display of gender will be possible, as when she pummels he who holds her, as if out of hopelessness at having any effect upon the giant that has captured her, or hides her eyes from the terrible things that are being shown on the silver screen while he laughingly watches on, or squeals and turns away from the overexciting finish of a horse race, or runs across the street with her head down and her arms flailing in mock terror over the oncoming traffic, or unsuccessfully attempts to open a jar with a play at straining all her muscular reserve, or gestures abject fear when the phone rings and signals a call that is unwelcome, or gesticulates that walking over the stones to get to the water is destroying her tender feet, or that the cold is making her shiver like unto little Liza on the ice floe.

5. I have argued that genderisms are not generated by the impact of an unrelenting environment itself, but by an environment in some sense designed for the purpose of this evocation. Observe now that individuals need not wait for the environment to produce those circumstances for which the display of a genderism will provide a usable response. Individuals can apply a format that automatically transforms an environment into one which induces such a display, guaranteeing that something suitable will be found for ritual management. We tend to think of a chivalrous man helping a woman—unacquainted or merely acquainted—to manage a load that is heavy or messy or precariously placed, and therefore we can see him as someone who stands by parentally in case of trouble; but indeed, a male, bent on this sort of gallantry, can search a women-connected scene for the heaviest or messiest or most precarious concern she happens to have, and then volunteer help with what is thus found. This action on his part is then likely to be confirmed by the gratitude she shows for the consideration given her. But, of course, in *every* social situation involving a female (or anyone else) there will be a heaviest, a



messiest, and a most precarious concern, even though by the standards set in other settings, this may involve something that is light, clean, and safe. (There is a symmetry here; a female can similarly search the scene for whatever in it is best adapted to release her from an indication of weakness, fear, mechanical incompetence, or, on the other side, give evidence of her capacity to provide minor domestic-like services.)

6. I have suggested that every physical surround, every room, every box for social gatherings, necessarily provides materials that can be used in the display of gender and the affirmation of gender identity. But, of course, the social interaction occurring in these places can be read as supplying these materials also. Participants in any gathering must take up some sort of microecological position relative to one another, and these positions will provide ready metaphors for social distance and relatedness, just as they will provide sign vehicles for conveying relative rank.

More important, the management of talk will itself make available a swarm of events usable as signs. Who is brought or brings himself into the immediate orbit of another; who initiates talk, who is selected as the addressed recipient, who self-selects in talk turn-taking, who establishes and changes topics, whose statements are given attention and weight, and so forth. As with verbal interaction, so also with joint participation in silent projects such as walking together, arranging objects, and the like. For here, too, organization requires that someone make the decisions and coordinate the activity; and again the opportunity is available, often apparently unavoidably so, for someone to emerge as dominant, albeit in regard to trivial matters.

An interactional field, then, provides a considerable expressive resource, and it is, of course, upon this field that there is projected the training and beliefs of the participants. It is here that sex-class makes itself felt, here in the organization of face-to-face interaction, for here understandings about sex-based dominance can be employed as a means of deciding who decides, who leads, and who follows. Again, these scenes do not so much allow for the expression of natural differences between the sexes as for the production of that difference itself.

May I recommend that the capacity to work social situations for what can inevitably be found in them is of considerable importance. When boys and girls are socialized, one of the basic things they learn is this capacity to size up a social situation for what can be expressively wrung from it. This capacity in turn depends upon the culture's idiom of expression, itself fed from several sources, such as—in Western culture—training in the ideally expressive envi-

ronments of games and contests, imagery drawn from animal lore, residues from military training, and so forth. In consequence, men and women are able to scan any ongoing social activity for means through which to express gender. And, of course, these means do considerable organizational work; as suggested, what becomes involved is the question of who makes the decisions in regard to a multitude of small doings which, pieced together, allow for smooth collaborative activity. Some of this organizational work need not be done. Much of it could be done by celebrating other statuses. But given that this work *is* presently done by an appeal to sex-class, and given that various institutional practices ensure the copresence of men and women, then the question becomes moot as to whether these rituals ought to be seen as a means of celebrating the social structure, or whether the importance of the social structure, at least in its relevant aspects, ought to be seen as that of providing a template for expressive displays which help to organize social situations. (Which is not to say that social structure is somehow a construct or real only as it affects what occurs in face-to-face interaction.)

## 8.

I have argued that females are a distinctive disadvantaged category in that they alone among these—save only children—are idealized, in Western society as pure, fragile, valued objects, the givers and receivers of love and care, this giving and receiving being, in a way, their office. And I have also pressed a kind of institutional reflexivity, the argument that deep-seated institutional practices have the effect of transforming social situations into scenes for the performance of genderisms by both sexes, many of these performances taking a ritual form which affirms beliefs about the differential human nature of the two sexes even while indications are provided as to how behavior between the two can be expected to be intermeshed. Now consider the politics of these rituals.

First note that the traditional ideals of femininity and the ideals of masculinity are alike in that both sets tend to be supported for the relevant sex by both sexes. At the same time, the ideals are complementary in that the ones held for women are differentiated from the ones held for men and yet the two fit together. Frailty is fitted to strength, gentleness to sternness, diffuse serving to project orientation, mechanical unknowingness to mechanical competencies, delicacy relative to contamination vs. insensitivity to contamination, and so forth. It turns out, then, that a woman could only realize the ideals of femininity by holding herself away from the heat, grime, and competition of the world beyond the household. So these ideals have, then, a political consequence, that of relieving persons who are males from half the

competition they would otherwise face. (A similar consequence can be attributed to age-grading and late schooling.) This in no way implies, of course, that a woman has no ability to make her suitors compete for her hand, or make the one to whom she is inclined dance at her attendance to further his suit, but only that this female power is sequestered from the main show. As she herself is. Even those females who are able and willing to trade some of their favors in exchange for special consideration in the work world will find themselves quite differently related to the contingencies of employment than are males, a difference that then continues to mark at least middle-class women off as belonging essentially to a work-alien, private-sphere.

But this sequestering itself is of a special kind. For, as already considered, social organization ensures that men and women will be in one another's presence, women being a disadvantaged group that is not (in modern society) hidden away in bad neighborhoods or in barracks on the outskirts of town. So the difference between the sex-classes will very commonly be something that can be given ritual expression.

Apologists can, then, interpret the high value placed on femininity as a balance and compensation for the substantive work that women find they must do in the domestic sphere and for their subordination in, if not exclusion from, public spheres. And the courtesies performed for and to women during social occasions can be seen as redress for the retiring role they are obliged to play at these times. What could be thought good about their situation, then, seems always to enter as a means of cloaking what could be thought bad about it. And every indulgence society shows to women can be seen as a mixed blessing.

## 9.

Surely the argument that ours is a sexist society is valid—as it is for societies in general. A considerable amount of what persons who are men do in affirmation of their sense of identity requires their doing something that can be seen as what a woman by her nature could not do, or at least could not do well; and the reverse can be said about persons who are women. Furthermore, some of these doings the individual does in the company of the other sex, an arrangement facilitated by diverse institutional practices, allowing for the dialogic performance of identity—ritual statements by one party receiving ritual answers from the other party, both displays being necessary for the full portrayal of the human nature of the individuals involved. But, of course, in the case of persons who are women, the issue is not merely that they are in a complementary position to persons who are men; the issue is that for women

this complementarity also means vulnerability and, in the feelings of some, oppression. In this light, and as an illustration, consider public life.

Wherever an individual is or goes he must bring his body along with him. That means that whatever harm bodies can do, or be vulnerable to, goes along, too. As for vulnerabilities, their source allows us to distinguish two kinds. First, impersonal risks seen as lodged in a setting and not specifically intended for the recipient: physical risks—fire, falling objects, accidental collision, etc.; medical risks due to contagion, poisons, etc.; contamination of body by smell and grime. Second (and our concern here), social risks, those seen as a product of a malefactor's intention. Here central matters are physical assault, robbery, sexual molestation, kidnapping, blocking of passage, breaching of conversational preserves, verbal insult delivered in conversation already established, importunement. Whomsoever an individual is in the presence of, he makes them vulnerable in these ways and they make him vulnerable similarly.

Now the standard feature of all public life—especially that occurring whenever unacquainted individuals come into one another's immediate presence—is that the inclination to exploit the immediate vulnerability of others is suppressed, if not repressed. A folk theory is maintained that indeed persons can be physically close and be of no interest whatsoever to one another, that, for example, not even evaluative assessment of social attributes is occurring. Among the unacquainted, the symbol of this arrangement is civil inattention, the process of glancing at an other to express that one has no untoward intent nor expects to be an object of it, and then turning the glance away, in a combination of trust, respect, and apparent unconcern.

The arrangement under which an individual causes no difficulty and is given none, when both prospects are eminently feasible, is felt to be ensured by devices of social control. The law is one factor (at least it used to be so thought); another, disapproval and moral condemnation by witnesses to the act—in effect, the threat of defaming. In the case of attack on males (or on females by other females) there is also the issue of physical and verbal counterattack, the possibility of getting back in return what had theretofore been suppressed, and getting as good as one gives or better.

It is known, of course, that conventional standards of social control in public places can prove inadequate; if not that, then certainly that individuals can come to believe that this is the case. The consequence is felt insecurity in public places. What I want to consider here, however, is the special relation of females to these circumstances.

As suggested, women are not trained in fighting and moreover are encouraged to employ quite passive means of avoiding fights and to withdraw from such as have begun. Therefore, relative to men under attack, women are less capable and felt to be so. (I suppose it might be said that men must fear being shown up as unwilling to fight, and that women have less to fear in this matter.) It seems also the case that a woman is at a disadvantage in giving insult back in response to attack. She is faced with the dilemma that any remonstrance becomes in itself a form of self-exposure, ratifying a connection that theretofore had merely been improperly attempted. (Surely an insidious trick on the part of social organization.) Also, not socialized into the fighting frame, she can find herself blithely returning an insult—when a man, mindful of possible escalation, might be leery of doing so—which, in turn, evokes a response that cannot be managed by either party. The male recipient of female insult can feel, for example, that his readiness to abjure the use of physical force with females presupposed that females would not press quarrels to the point where a fight would ordinarily be required; finding that this tacit contract has been breached, he may not know what to do, and whatever he does, do it in a troubled and confused way.<sup>14</sup>

But the difference between the sexes in the matter of being vulnerable in public places goes deeper still.

Consider again what an individual can suffer at another's hands in public. There is loss of life, an equal value as between the sexes except perhaps in time of war. There is injury to limbs, presumably also an equal matter, except that bodily disfigurement is perhaps a greater contingency for females than for males. (More important, perhaps, life and limb, being thought to have ultimate value, can be used in coercive exchange, as in "Your money or your life.") There is the disarray of personal front (clothing and appearance), likely in any physical altercation, and here the standards women are obliged to maintain are considerably more strict than those required of men. (After all, for a woman to appear in public with her costume disarrayed can be taken as a sign of accessibility and looseness of morals.) There is expropriation of cash and valuables, men probably having somewhat more to lose of the first, woman of the second.

From this point, the situation of the two sexes sharply differs. Except in prison, men in modern society can't be much threatened by sexual violence nor threatened by physical harm if sexual access is not allowed; women can be. But there is a more subtle and more important difference. As suggested, the courtship process leads the male to press his pursuit, first in finding some reason for opening up a state of talk, and second, in overcoming the social

distance initially maintained therein. Breaching of existing distance, partly on speculation, is, then, a standard part of the male's contribution to cross-sex dealings, at least as far as the male is concerned. And it is in the nature of his view of these dealings that they know no season or place; any occasion will do. All good-looking females wherever found are worth a moment's ogling, and this attention also allows for discernment of possible signs of encouragement or (if not that) signs that discouragement is not complete. And men can be easily confirmed in this approach because they know that many of the relationships they do end up having with women began in this way and were not likely to have begun at all had no breaching occurred. Note that women themselves do not take a consistent line here, for just as some will be offended by these overreachings, so others (even as they discourage the interest shown their person) can be inwardly pleased by the delict, seeing in it an indication of their rating, a measure of their "attractiveness."<sup>15</sup>

It follows, then, that females are somewhat vulnerable in a chronic way to being "hassled;" for what a male can improperly press upon them by way of drawing them into talk or by way of improperly extending talk already initiated stands to gain him (and indeed her) a lot, namely, a relationship, and if not this, then at least confirmation of *gender* identity.<sup>16</sup>

In this context, rebuffs on the part of the female carry special contingencies. The issue appears in starkest form, perhaps, in robbery itself, apart from matters of sex. For it turns out that once the robber has broken cover and revealed himself as a wrongdoer, as a culprit committing an indictable offense, such aggressive feelings as he might otherwise have had but suppressed become something he might as well express, having already paid most of the price for such expression. His "wantonly" injuring his victim may, then, be a sign not of special sadistic impulse but rather of what we all might inflict were no penalty (at least no further penalty) to be incurred. Something similar can occur in the case of salutations some men feel impelled to extend to women with whom they are unacquainted. When such overtures are rebuffed, the male finds not only that he is exposed as desiring what he is now judged unworthy of receiving, but also that he has established himself as someone who has attempted to improperly force or extend a communicative contact. Not uncommonly, then, he uses this channel to redefine what he has not been able to obtain, openly conveying insults to she who has denied him.

And one can see why men are not reciprocally subject to molestation by women; for in general, were a woman to press her favors, there would be men who could only stand to gain by accepting. Takers could always be found. And one can see that women have a power men do not much have, that of

allowing access to themselves. A wife can thus betray her husband more easily than the reverse, even though he has greater mobility, implying access to a larger number of pastures.

So it is apparent that men and women find themselves quite differently related to public life, its contingencies being very much greater for females than for males, and for reasons that are structurally deep-seated. This difference cuts sharply and cleanly along sex-class lines in spite of the fact that physical potential for assault and for self-defense is by no means so clearly divisible into non-overlapping classes. Plainly, it is for membership sorting that biology provides a neat and tidy device; the contingencies and response that seem so naturally to follow along the same lines are a consequence of social organization.

## NOTES

1. It is apparent, of course, that there are cases of temporary misassignment at birth, cases of mixed biological signs (intersexing), and, recently, surgical and social "reassignment." It should be just as apparent that these three classes of cases are exceptional, that they take their significance from the fact that they are exceptional, and that sex-class placement is, relative to all other placements, regorously achieved.
2. See Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, 1 (1975), pp. 1-30, especially p. 9ff.
3. The history of parallel arrangements for the sexes in American society has never been written.
4. Jessie Bernard in *Women and the Public Interest* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 26, 28, provides a version: ascription; diffuseness; particularism; collectivity-orientation; affectivity; passivity in love-making; obedience, submissiveness to commands and rules, dependence, fearfulness, modesty, chastity, bashfulness, maidenly reserve, love of home, restricted outside interests, monogamic inclination, interest in bodily adornment, love of finery, care for babies.
5. "Civil inattention" allows male and female a quick mutual glance. Her *second* quick look can serve as a signal of encouragement to him. Some men have much experience with second looks; other men, practically none. For experimental and field evidence, see Mark S. Cary, "Nonverbal Openings to Conversation," paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association Meetings, April 18, 1974, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and "Talk? Do You Want to Talk?: Negotiation for the Initiation of Conversation between the Unacquainted," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, 1975.
6. Current tendencies in the direction of no-fault, no alimony divorce, defined as liberalization, override this compensatory arrangement, ensuring that at least some women will get the worst of both worlds.
7. For example, Diana Russell, *The Politics of Rape* (New York, 1975), pp. 28, 38, 99, 132, 201, 223.
8. This accounts for some paradoxical facts. Given that men are defined as desiring access to women and women as holding them in check, it would seem that men

would have less license to be familiar with women, in the sense of touching, than have women with men. But, I believe, among nonintimates, men touch women more than the reverse. For men have the right, apparently, to have their reachings seen as protective or joking or undemandingly affectionate; the same act performed by a woman to a man could too easily be read as an invitation, an open movement outward, and thus tends to be suppressed. (Here see Nancy Henley, "The Politics of Touch," in *Radical Psychology*, Phil Brown, ed. [New York, 1973], pp. 421–433.) Between men and women who have a socially ratified intimacy, women seem to have the greater license.

The matter extends beyond obvious reachings out like touch to quite passive ways of being exposed. Thus, a woman who carries on or with her a camera, a dog, a book, or almost any object, is providing reasons strangers can use as a basis for initiating a comment to her and is thus in effect exposing herself.

9. Recently, of course, in the U.S.A. there has been public protest against sex segregation of facilities and activities, feminists taking the lead.
10. Harold L. Wilensky, "Women's Work: Economic Growth, Ideology, Structure," *Industrial Relations*, 7, 3 (1968), p. 244: "If they do go on [to graduate school] they overwhelmingly head toward traditionally 'feminine' fields such as art, nursing, education, social work, biochemistry, English, languages, and the humanities."
11. In noting the special functions of sprinkling women selectively in the work scene, one ought to take note also of a parallel process, the placement of large, sleek white men in highly visible executive and political roles where they can serve as representatives of organizations and in its name meet its specialized public.
12. Russell, *op.cit.*
13. In rural settlements, square dancing used to provide a nicely patterned opportunity for males to swing their partners off their feet, to the accompaniment of squeals of pleasurable fear, all this under the eye of the whole community. Children, of course, are even more subject to playful assaults, such as being thrown into the air and caught, swung by the hands, and so forth. Observe, too, that there are special play environments, such as swimming pools, hay stacks, and the like, which allow a whole cosmos of unserious playful acts, that being one of their functions.
14. The traditional solution was for a male companion of the threatened female to do the fighting for her, constituting himself her champion. In liberated circles this recourse is sometimes disapproved.
15. Some relevant evocations are provided by Doris Lessing, *The Summer Before the Dark* (New York, 1973), pp. 180–207.
16. A useful informal literature is available on hassling. See, for example, Gwenda Linda Blair, "Standing on the Corner," *Liberation* 18, 9 (July-August 1974) pp. 6–8; Barbara Damrosch, "The Sex Ray: One Woman's Theory of Street Hassling," *Village Voice*, April 7, 1975, p. 7.



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## **Notes**

### <sup>2</sup> **The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America**

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg

*Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1. (Autumn, 1975), pp. 1-29.

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