Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660–1760

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The powerful appeal of the category “patriarchy” depends upon, but also is limited by, its implicit claim to a comprehensive application. In recent years it is the limitation of the term that has seemed most visible. In naming the persistent experience of male dominance—across cultures, across historical periods—patriarchy” operates on a level of abstract reference that appears to posit an implausibly universal human nature and that, by seeming to explain everything, in the end explains very little. Some have urged the replacement of “patriarchy” by categories more concretely reflective of contextual variation. But any effort at historical or cultural specification requires a universalizing backdrop of the sort asserted by “patriarchy” to render its object intelligible as the singular instance of a general phenomenon.

In the following essay I aim to argue a broad thesis about how and why the modern system of gender difference was established during the English Restoration and eighteenth century. In making this argument I hope to exemplify how patriarchy may be historicized: how the history of male dominance may be understood to entail a general continuity complicated by specific and divergent discontinuities. Central to my thesis will be the view that to historicize patriarchy requires, among other things, an inquiry into the relationship between the modern systems of sexuality—of sex and gender difference—and class. Much of my argument will be based on

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evidence drawn from recent research into early modern political theory, marriage law, agrarian change, the conceptual history of sexuality, and the social history of homosexuality. It should go without saying that the entire argument is deeply indebted to the work on gender and patriarchy undertaken by feminist studies over the past two decades.

Some recent research substantiates and sophisticates received wisdom; some of it propounds new lines of thought. My procedure will be to use both kinds of research to formulate and develop a hypothesis that conceives gender difference within the context of the early modern divisions of labor and knowledge. I will conclude with a brief discussion of the demands involved in trying to account for historical change of the sort posited in the notion of an early modern "division," change that is both monolithic in its broadest scope and diversely ramified in its human applications.¹

I

There is some value in employing the term "patriarchalism" to refer to the traditional regime that is replaced by the modern conception of gender difference. Although specifically associated with Sir Robert Filmer's theory of royal absolutism, "patriarchalism" also takes in, more inclusively, the set of ideas and social practices entailed in the analogy between the family and the state.² The patriarchal analogy works because it is based on a hierarchical notion of authority that is implicitly analogical: as in the microcosm, so in the macrocosm. In premodern England this analogy was "traditional" in the sense that it was entertained and acted upon as a tacit and unexamined article of belief—a way of giving to political arrangements the apparently integral and natural legitimacy of family arrangements. Puritan thought and the onset of political crisis in the seventeenth century forced this tacit knowledge to become explicit. Now the analogy between familial and political order had to be rationalized, and people were obliged to concretize both terms and acknowledge what was problematic in the comparison. The apparent integrity of patriarchal authority in the family was found in fact to consist of several distinct authorities—that of the father, the husband, and the master—whose compound complexity deviated from the simplicity of the model of absolute royal prerogative.³ In this sense, Filmer marks not the triumphant ascendancy of patriarchal thought, but its demise as tacit knowledge, the fact that it is in crisis. He wrote his Patriarcha on the eve of warfare between royalists and parliamentarians in 1642; it was published in 1680 and again in 1685, when the Exclusion Crisis renewed that conflict in other terms.⁴

This is not to say, however, that Filmer's opponents were immediately prepared to reject the analogy. In 1644, the parliamentarian Henry Parker argued that because arbitrary power does not rule the family, therefore it is not to be endured in the state: "And who now hath any competent share of reason, can suppose, that if God and nature have been so careful to provide for liberty in Families, and in particulars; that Man would introduce, or ought to endure slavery, when it is introduced upon whole States and Generalities?"⁵ In 1700, twelve years after the absolutist James II had been deposed, the feminist Mary Astell reversed Parker's ques-
tion: “if absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a State, how comes it to be so in a Family? Or if in a Family why not in a State; since no reason can be alleged for the one that will not hold more strongly for the other?” Although Filmer, Parker, and Astell disagree on the question of whether the family and the state are institutions grounded in absolute authority, they agree on the continued plausibility of the analogy between family and state. And yet the more the nature and terms of the analogy were subjected to self-conscious examination, the more inevitably its force was undermined. In his *Second Treatise of Government* (printed in 1690), John Locke took the next decisive step by arguing that “the Power of a Magistrate over a Subject, may be distinguished from that of a Father over his Children, a Master over his Servant, a Husband over his Wife, and a Lord over his Slave.” Locke’s famous argument formalized, in terms of a liberal political theory, a two-part development whose cultural significance was far-reaching. First, it articulated the growing conviction that the world of the family and that of the state were regulated by fundamentally different—respectively customary and contractual—principles. Second, by restricting female identity to that of wife and mother, roles whose customary authority in the broad domain of kinship was now gradually limited to the circumscribed domain of the household, it conceived the contractual affairs of the polity as an exclusively male preserve.

The foundering of patriarchal political theory at the end of the seventeenth century can be explained by reference to political developments, in particular to the succession crisis that dominated Restoration politics. Monarchical succession is based on a model of dynastic inheritance. Increasing suspicion of the heir to the House of Stuarts—James, Duke of York—culminated in the failed effort to exclude him from the royal succession, and in his successful deposition soon after he acceded to the throne in 1685. In the Hanoverian Settlement of 1689, England’s rulers agreed that dynastic inheritance, and the patriarchalist principles on which it is based, may be overruled by pressing considerations. By implication, the interests of political subjects are not necessarily best served by the system of patrilineage. But the Hanoverian Settlement and the demise of patriarchalist political theory cannot be understood simply as a matter of constitutional politics. They also represent one outcome of a more general, early modern disenchantment with aristocratic ideology. For present purposes, aristocratic ideology can be summarized as the set of related beliefs that birth makes worth, that the interests of the family are identified with those of its head, and that among the gentry, honor and property are to be transmitted patrimonially and primogeniturally, through the male line. The attack on these beliefs took many forms. It was even argued that honor of birth has nothing to do with internal virtue and competence—hence the depravity, corruption, and incompetence of male aristocrats. By this way of thinking, the aristocratic family subjugates its members to the unjust tyranny of patriarchal power and the rule of primogeniture.

Restoration and early eighteenth-century innovations in marriage law have an evident relevance to this widespread outcry against the monolithic injustice of the aristocratic family. The device of the “strict settlement” effectively discriminated the several family interests. It reinforced the patrimonial rights of the eldest son but strictly limited his powers of alienation; it attended to the bride’s jointure should she be widowed; and it guaranteed provisions for daughters and younger sons. Thus the strict settlement separated out elements “which, by the less scrupulous and
self-conscious consensus of aristocratic ideology, were less problematically comprehended within the general category of ‘family.”11 In a similar fashion, Restoration innovations in marriage settlements and separate maintenance contracts brought to fruition a long-term development of doctrines permitting married women to possess separate property. We have seen that the contractual assumptions of liberal political theory had no real application to the civil rights of eighteenth-century women. As Susan Staves has showed, however, contemporary legal thinking went some distance toward applying contractual logic to the status of married women. After flourishing for the better part of a century, these legal devices were countered through an effort to reassert the common law principle that husbands and wives are one person—that husbands absorb most of their wives’ property on marriage and logically cannot contract with them thereafter. But although this effort to restrict married women’s separate property was in many ways successful, over the longer term the separability of married women’s property interests from those of their husbands became an article of English marriage law.12

II

Thus far my argument concerning the death of patriarchalism has pursued what might be called a double separation. The family is increasingly distinguished from the state, while the component members of the family are increasingly distinguished from each other. If we pursue this phenomenon beyond the evidence of political, social, and legal ideology we arrive at the testimony of socioeconomic change. What we have learned to call the separation of the public from the domestic sphere is materially grounded in the capitalist transformation of the English countryside. To put this another way, the emergence of modern patriarchy, and its system of gender difference, cannot be understood apart from the emergence of the modern division of labor and class formation. Although the complexity of the capitalist transformation of the countryside militates against precise chronology, it obviously both predates my period and continues thereafter. Nevertheless, some crucial features of the change may be associated with the years from 1660 to 1760.

In the last few years, the pioneering research of Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck has been both corrected and confirmed by feminist historians interested in the nature of women’s work in early modern England.13 At the beginning of the sixteenth century, economic production was dominated by what historians have variously called the domestic system, the domestic economy, and the family economy—a system in which the household was the major unit of production. Attempts to generalize about how this domestic economy was undermined in early modern England are frustrated by crucial variations in households based on differences in region and social status. Still, it can be said that in 1500, all women were also housewives, involved in production both for the subsistence of the household and, often, for market.14 The domestic economy operated according to a schematic sexual division of labor—between female “inside” work and male “outside” work—that was in practice rather flexible and scarcely operative on smaller holdings. In such an economy, husbands exercised the authority of the head of a household that was organized as an integrated working partnership.15
The breakdown of the domestic economy, and the concomitant withdrawal of women from work deemed economically productive, was most immediately the result of capitalist innovation. The flexibility of traditional work relations depended on customary arrangements that capitalist improvement rendered unprofitable. Enclosure and the consolidation of large estates increasingly denied to lesser farmers the subsistence conditions on which their households had depended. The loss of commons rights—not only grazing, but gathering fuel and gleaning harvest leavings—deprived women in particular of customary labor. When farmers lost access to land, their wives lost the means to keep a cow and practice dairying, a common form of women’s work. As a result, outside work traditionally available to women simply disappeared at the lower social strata. At the higher social strata, increased sensitivity to price levels and market demand marginalized dairying in favor of more profitable production, or transformed it into a commercial activity under the control of hired managers.16

What happened to that portion of the agrarian economy not organized through the household? Over the course of the eighteenth century, there was a general decrease in the agricultural employment of women, and work patterns for men and women outside the household diverged in a number of ways. Increasingly, female employment was concentrated in spring activities like dairying and calving, while male labor was specialized in the fall harvesting of cereal crops, which required heavier technology. Especially in the latter half of the century, moreover, male real wages rose as female real wages declined. By limiting quasi–independent domestic production, capitalist improvement exerted pressure on what was increasingly understood as “the labor market,” so as to throw women into competition with men. This was especially true in the fall, when the vulnerability of laborers in cereal production to structural unemployment put a premium on the availability of nonharvesting jobs. That men tended to prevail in this competition was both a cause and a consequence of developing conceptions of familial income as primarily male income.17

At the higher social levels, the differential process of class formation led women (and men) who aspired to a proto—“bourgeois” gentility to value idleness in women. In such households, women’s work was increasingly oriented toward female accomplishments, while cheap wage labor did what was once the inside work of wives. In more modest households, husbands and wives turned increasingly to wage labor, seeking work outside the home. Both lost thereby the traditional liberty to define the tasks entailed in their work. But laboring women, as we have seen, were also losing the opportunity for this kind of employment as well. The decrease of female employment in the latter half of the eighteenth century is closely correlated with a rise in fertility, whose principal causes are a fall in the age of women at first marriage and a rise in the number of women who married. It seems plausible to connect these developments: “as female employment became more precarious and lowly paid, there were obvious motives to marry younger as defense against the unemployment which was increasingly the lot of women.” Even as the incidence of marriage increased, however, wives were losing the flexibility once enjoyed in household labor, which was in the process of becoming “housework,” the exclusive domain of women and increasingly denigrated as unproductive.18 The process is reflected in contempo-
rary religious teaching. Seventeenth-century Puritan divines relegated housework to the category of “private callings,” and some argued that what one did as a housewife had no bearing on salvation. 19

So, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the distinction between “inside” and “outside” work, based upon a flexible sexual division of labor, had gone a long way—at least in the higher social orders—toward ossifying into the familiar, culturally ramified opposition between the domestic and the public realms. 20 The completion of this ideological process in the following century would entail not only a further rigidification and universalization of the division across class lines, but also a revaluation of domestic work as not so much lesser as different: economically unproductive, but charged with the office of spiritual cultivation and maternal nurture. This must be supplemented, however, by two caveats. First, it should be clear that male domination and the subordination of women are constants in this long-term process. What changes is the form patriarchy takes under different historical circumstances. Second, the modern ideology of separate spheres has a cultural authority whose force doesn’t require demonstration. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the ideology systematizes and superintends a social practice whose complex variability belies the stark simplicity of the model.

My argument has been that the long-term and uneven shift from patriarchalism to modern patriarchy entailed a separation out of elements which had formerly been tacitly understood and experienced as parts of an integral whole—the cosmos, the social order, the family, economic production. This schematic distinction between “traditional” and “modern” ways of organizing experience may also be expressed as the difference between a “vertical” hierarchy of interlocking rungs and a “horizontal” differentiation of discrete interests. In the seventeenth century, the language of “interest” began to discriminate not only among private family members but also among private political, social, and economic agents over against the public interest of the sovereign power. 21 In the eighteenth century, the leveling of status hierarchy took shape in the emergence of the language and assumptions of “class,” which is sanctioned not by vertical bonds of affiliation and interdependence but by shared interests and by horizontal solidarity over against other classes. 22 I want to suggest in what follows that the process of differentiation entailed in the rise of modern patriarchy can be illuminated by juxtaposing it with these contemporaneous developments—that the early modern emergence of class is one crucial element in the historicization of patriarchy.

III

The foregoing evidence suggests that the form of modern patriarchy depends upon the structural separation of the genders: that the emergence of modern patriarchy is coextensive with the emergence of gender difference, which is therefore historically specific to the modern era. I will pursue this thesis by drawing on a related body of research. It is now commonly understood that the discourse of sexuality coalesced during the eighteenth century, when the relatively unitary focus on sex in matrimonial relations subdivided into a multiple focus on different kinds of
sexuality. With the aid of Thomas Laqueur, we may gain access to this same territory by recognizing that it was also only in the eighteenth century that female bodies ceased to be seen as aberrant versions of a unitary male body, and were viewed instead as physically and naturally different. Like the other, contemporaneous, transformations I’ve already discussed, this one was neither sudden nor comprehensive. Even within the medical profession, class difference ensured that the alteration in attitudes and practices was gradual, uneven, and in a real sense incomplete.

Nevertheless, the change was real and deeply consequential. And although biological research that substantiated the modern view was a decisive factor, the change depended first of all on a shift in scientific ideology. As in the patriarchalist analogy between the family and the state, traditional science was predicated on a hierarchical view of kinds of bodies as interlocking, analogical microcosms of a greater macrocosm. In this view, there is only one sex, and sex is a sociological rather than an ontological category. Men and women exist on a continuum whose basic discriminants are social rank, cultural role, and legal entitlements, not organic identity. Embodied sexuality was relatively elastic and fluid. “Nature” was not conceived as a physiological bedrock stabilizing sexual personality; and the distinction between the biologically grounded category “sex” and the socially constructed category “gender” was therefore largely unintelligible.

In the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, England acquired the modern wisdom that there are not one but two sexes; that they are biologically distinct and therefore incommensurable; and that they are defined not by behavior, which is variable, but by nature, which is not. The evidence reinforces the schematic pattern already observed in other areas: from a totality differentiated by matters of degree there emerges, toward the end of the seventeenth century, the imperative to distinguish and divide differences of kind. It is a change from a system in which the tacitly acknowledged difference between men and women is experienced as inescapably interwoven with sociocultural factors, to one in which the difference between men and women, although complex and problematic, is nonetheless understood as what renders the system systematic. To be sure, the assertion of sexual difference remains constant despite this crucial transformation. The transformation is nonetheless crucial. For it is “in the nature of” the modern, materialist criterion of the “natural” to distinguish between autonomous phenomena with a definitive empiricism that is absent in pre-modern thought, where the hierarchical differentiation between macrocosm and microcosm posits, by definition, an essential thread of metaphysical continuity.

In one sense, of course, it would be absurd to claim that it is only now that gender difference is established in English culture. Many would say, for example, that the biological asymmetry of childbirth has always ensured gendered differences in behavior. I want to suggest, however, that only with the modern system of sexuality—of sex and gender difference—is “gender” sufficiently separated out as a category from “sex” (from that which it defines itself against) to take on the familiar, differential function it performs in modern culture. This is a double function. In the modern system of sexuality, the category “gender” works to discriminate not only socialized behavior from natural fact, but also masculinity from femininity.
Now, there is an evident tension between these two functions. On the one hand, the discrimination of gender from sex opens up a broad if indeterminate range within which "sexual" behavior resists an absolute and dichotomizing categorization because it is socially relative and variable, undetermined by the laws of natural difference. It is as though the traditional, sociocultural embeddedness of the difference between men and women were now separated out and concentrated as an explicit and inescapable principle of social construction. On the other hand, this movement inevitably entails the corollary concentration and empowerment of the natural. In fact, the determinant authority of the natural in modern culture derives precisely from its unprecedented separability from the sociocultural, which henceforth always stands at risk of a naturalizing takeover. This sort of takeover can be seen in the paradoxical way modern usage tends to discriminate between masculine and feminine "gender" so as to bracket the radical effect of its implicit distinction between culture and nature, treating gender difference as a strictly dyadic, experientially articulated and socially mediated expression of sexual difference rather than as ontologically distinct from it. I think this tension is inherent in the modern system of sexuality, which promotes a rigid, "naturalistic" differentiation of "genders" even as it expressly promulgates "gender" as a category whose social character precludes such differentiation.

Of course, the slippage from the counternatural to the naturalized conception of gender can be avoided. Yet because the modern conceptualization and analysis of gender difference is authorized by the discovery of a fundamental sexual difference—because the early modern "emergence of gender difference" is therefore also the emergence of sexual difference—gender is inseparable from and coextensive with sex. When we make the gender argument, we tend to presume a sexual dispensation that will, by the very demands of the argument, evade meticulous examination. This can be seen with unusual clarity in the way Bernard Mandeville, in 1723, unmask as an acculturation the apparent naturalness of female modesty:

The Lessons of [modesty], like those of Grammar, are taught us long before we have occasion for, or understand the Usefulness of them . . . A Girl who is modestly educated, may, before she is two Years old, begin to observe how careful the Women, she converses with, are of covering themselves before Men; and the same caution being inculcated to her by Precept, as well as Example, it is very probable that at Six she'll be ashamed of shewing her Leg, without knowing any Reason why such an Act is blameable, or what the Tendency of it is. . . .

This strict Reservedness is to be comply'd with by all young Women, especially Virgins, if they value the Esteem of the polite and knowing World; Men may take greater Liberty, because in them the Appetite is more violent and ungovernable. Had equal Harshness of Discipline been imposed upon both, neither of them could have made the first Advances, and Propagation must have stood still among all the Fashionable People: which being far from the Politician's Aim, it was advisable to ease and indulge the Sex that suffer'd most by the Severity, and make the Rules abate of their Rigour, where the Passion was the strongest, and the Burthen of a strict Restraint would have been the most intolerable. . . .
The Multitude will hardly believe the excessive Force of Education, and in the difference of Modesty between Men and Women ascribe that to Nature, which is altogether owing to early Instruction. . . . It is Shame and Education that contains [sic] the Seeds of all Politeness. . . .

In Mandeville’s argument, the developing notion of a naturally based difference between male and female sexual appetites provides the necessary foundation for the brilliant analysis of the gendered—that is, the acculturated—quality of behavior and of the virtues with which it’s associated. The brilliance of the analysis is characteristic of an age that may justly be seen as witnessing the birth of the sociological imagination, which demystifies what appears given by recognizing it as, not natural, but social or cultural. What must be recognized as well, however, is the flip side of this insight: its dependence on a knowledge of what is truly given, without which the demystification loses all coherence. At the most abstract level, the Enlightenment defamiliarization of the natural depends on the fundamental principle of empirical epistemology, the insistence that knowledge requires the self-conscious detachment of the subject from its object of knowledge. In this way, the empiricist insistence on a radical separation of subject from object enacts its wholesale repudiation of tacit knowledge. The separation isolates what is known from the familiar and customary matrix of its intelligibility. Yet in the same gesture, it also preserves that matrix itself—the province of the knowing subject—as immune to such skeptical analysis.

IV

I have already alluded to a relationship between the antihierarchical, “horizontal” systems of sexuality and class difference as they emerge in early modern England. The relationship is complex because it coordinates cultural systems that have a fundamental singularity. On the one hand, although it is loose and resistant to precise application, a suggestive analogy can be felt between the early modern systems of sexuality and class. On the other hand, the two systems are involved in a differential interaction in which each appears to undertake the cultural labor formerly performed by the other (although the thesis of an emergence of course precludes just this presumption of a continuity between “former” and “present” instances of an integral system). I will suggest here some features both of the analogy and of the differential interaction.

In separating out what were formerly held together, the modern system of sexuality both criticized an essentialism of bodily “naturalness” and sophisticated it as a normative ground for modern personality. The modern system of class also emerged from a former unity that conjoined what we would distinguish as “status” and “class” criteria—the genealogical prescriptions of blood on the one hand and financial/professional activity on the other. Or, to state this rather differently, the status assumption that birth automatically dictates worth was replaced by a class conviction that birth and worth are independent variables. The standard of class criticizes the biological essentialism that consists in locating personal value in the bloodline, demystifying the “naturalness” of aristocratic honor as an arbitrary social construction. Defoe ridiculed the notion that honor is biologically inherited, “as if there
were some differing Species in the very Fluids of Nature . . . or some *Animalculae* of a differing and more vigorous kind.”35 “Nor should I speak a syllable against Honours being Hereditary,” said William Sprigge on the eve of the Restoration, “could the valour, Religion, and prudence of Ancestors be as easily intail’d on a line or family, as their Honours and Riches . . . Could they transmit their virtues as well as names unto their posterity, I should willingly become the Advocate of such a Nobility.”36 Against the essentialism of aristocratic honor, the standard of class propounds the contingent criterion of socioeconomic behavior and the fluidity of social mobility. Defoe’s indignant lines of 1700 contributed to this emergent standard:

What is’t to us, what Ancestors we had?
If Good, what better? or what worse, if Bad?

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For Fame of Families is all a Cheat,
’Tis Personal Virtue only makes us great.37

Now, it would be wrong to say that status prescriptions were simply and irresistibly replaced by the class conviction that personal achievement takes precedence over family and blood. Here as elsewhere, differences in social status ensured that change would be uneven. Just as the sexual division of labor (and hence the establishment of domestic ideology) proceeded more slowly at the lower social ranks, so common people clung, with increasing tenacity, to the traditional criterion of customary rights and privileges in the face of capitalist rationalization and modernization. Paradoxically, the persistence of the customary was instrumental in grounding the emergence of a radical working-class consciousness.38 The paradigmatic class of the future was therefore resistant, at first, to the differential terms of class conflict by which it would learn in time to conceive its own identity. And in the fabrication of working-class solidarity, “class identity” was commonly felt as a distinctively physical condition—a matter of complexion, familial inheritance, and modes of speech and self-articulation—and to be experienced as something whose loss could only be felt as a radical denaturing.39

Nevertheless, the undeniable overlap between “class identity” and “sexual identity” should not obscure their fundamental differences. Indeed, the relation between the modern systems of sexuality and class may plausibly be seen as one of inversion rather than analogy. Sexual difference was not invented in the early modern period; it ceased then to be embedded in the other registers of social situation and became relatively autonomized through association with biological condition. So in this respect, the modern co-emergence of sexuality and class depended on a corollary separation of the sexual from the social. As a result of this separation, sexual “identity” became more rigidly defined, at the same time that socioeconomic “identity,” freed of its traditional subservience to biological criteria of blood, became more variable. The emergent class system programmatically encourages mobility within its overarching structure of oppositional conflict; whereas the system of sexuality exists to enforce an innovative standard of differential stasis.

These changes are reflected in the history of attitudes toward the use of clothing as a social or sexual discriminant. English sumptuary legislation, which
flourished from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, is a surprisingly late development. Like the brief heyday of patriarchal theory, sumptuary legislation signalled not the strength but the instability of a once-tacit aristocratic ideology that now required explicit reinforcement. Edward Waterhouse knew this when, in 1665, he observed that our ancestors distinguished between their social stations by their “Garb, Equipage, Dyet, Housholdstuff, Clothes, [and] Education of Children . . . not by sumptuary Laws, or Magistratique sanction, but by common agreement, and general understanding.”40 By the early eighteenth century, a double revolution was underway. The demise of status–based sumptuary laws signalled the challenge to status by class criteria, whose more fluid conception of social difference spurned the crudity of legally stipulated physical signs. However, the impulse to enforce difference by dress did not disappear in the modern world. Sumptuary laws were replaced by less formal means of social regulation, by polemic rather than legislation. When Richard Steele created the role of literary “censor” for the Tatler in 1710, he remarked that “among all the Irregularities of which I have taken Notice, I know none so proper to be presented to the World by a Censor, as that of the general Expence and Affectation in equipage. I have lately hinted, that this Extravagance must necessarily get Footing where we have no Sumptuary Laws.”41 But although Steele’s immediate concern here is with codes of social status, polemic of the sort he is encouraging increasingly concentrated on the use of dress to regulate and discriminate genders far more than social orders.42 In this way, the evident analogy between sexual and class criteria can be seen in their mutual challenge to more traditional status criteria even as the fundamental inverse reciprocity between the two systems is also evident.

Let me pause here for a brief digression from the early modern to the present historical moment. It has been remarked more than once that in the current critical preoccupation with the triad of race, class, and gender, decidedly less interest has been shown in “class” than in the other two categories. The present discussion may clarify why this is so. The terms in which the triad has been formulated are puzzling on a number of counts. “Race” is a notoriously biologized category; to designate it for study these days is therefore implicitly to propose a program of analysis in which the cultural determinants of racial status may be separated out from its putative natural prescriptions.43 “Gender,” however, is already a radical instrument of social knowledge. Isn’t the homologous term for “race” not “gender” but “sex”? I have already suggested one reason for this confusing substitution. In much common usage, the idea of gender difference has tended to become absorbed into the system of sexuality as the social manifestation of biological condition, a tendency that nullifies its sociological force. From this defective perspective, “race” and “gender” invite analogous demystifications. More persuasively, however, the skeptical analysis of “race” yields its version of what is already presupposed in “gender”: a complex, socially embedded concept of ethnicity that sustains a delicate balance between cultural and natural attributions.

Like “gender,” “class” is a radical instrument of social knowledge that emerged out of the early modern divisions of labor and knowledge. But there is an important difference in the way each does its respective work. The modern system of sexuality is constituted by the subtle coimplication of “gender” and “sex” (hence the persistent temptation to reduce “gender” to “sex”); whereas “class” defines its
own system because it entails a definitive repudiation of its naturalizing antithesis. "Gender" and "sex" came into existence as dialectically inseparable counterparts engaged in the crucial adjudication of the boundaries of the biological. But "class" came into existence to demystify and replace a former rule of biological essence, the rule of inherited social status. "Class" named an increasingly conspicuous socioeconomic phenomenon and defined a way of thinking about human difference as not biologically given but socially variable: dynamic, conflictual, and alterable not only on the individual level of social mobility, but also on the macrolevel of social change. Over time, "class" came to serve as the banner of a palpable revolution in social description, marking the long-term triumph of attitudes toward social relations based on principles of historical contingency over those, like status and caste, that are based on genealogical prescription. And for these reasons, to conceive "class" as homologous to "gender"—especially in association with "race"—mistakenly attributes to it an implication in the problem of the natural that it is expressly formulated to supersede.

One possible impetus for this attribution may be found in bourgeois ideology and its powerfully persuasive program of self-naturalization, its insistence that the interests of the middle class represent the interests of universal humanity. And it may be that the commonplace triad of race, class, and gender has contributed to the confusion of the theory of class with bourgeois ideology, of "class" with the middle class. Such a confusion mistakes a method of articulating socioeconomic analysis and change for a means of shutting them down, and encourages the preeminently bourgeois notion that classes do not exist—that because there is really only one class, class conflict and indeed "class" itself are illusory categories of understanding. In this way, the skeptical critique of class as a naturalizing category may dovetail, in its effects, with the credulous embrace of bourgeois naturalness. In any case, because the category "class" is itself the agent of a demystifying project, its skeptical analysis can have no positive or productive yield. Rather, it precludes the very possibility of social understanding in the specifically socioeconomic register and leaves, by default, a landscape naturalized through the utter absence of analytic categories. Under these assumptions, "class" cannot fail to be an illusory category of understanding, because it appears to lack the substance required to generate (like "race" and "sex") a resilient social knowledge out of the ashes of its own demystificatory transmutation. But the comparative disuse of class analysis these days therefore entails a striking irony: that the corollary investment in the analysis of race and gender depends on their obscure but profound proximity to that biological substratum—to an irreducibly "natural" bodiliness—whose social authority it is the purpose of the analysis to discredit and supplant.44

To return to my argument, it may be useful now to revise my earlier remark by suggesting that we see the difference between men and women, and the difference between class and class, as overlapping regimes that jointly render the modern system systematic. The notion here of a common labor may seem at first unlikely. I have just made the case against conjoining the two systems according to any simple analogy. Moreover, the general modern tendency toward division has ensured in any case that sexuality and class customarily be taken to cover the territory of the modern
according to a strict division of labor. In one familiar and reflexive conceptualization, the split is gendered as a division between internal affect and external enterprise, between the private and the public spheres. It may be more valuable, however, to see the two systems as fundamentally united in their attention to the realm that modernity deems its central field of work, the realm of the material; and divided only in the way each construes the nature of that work. For the primary focus of the sexual system is of course on the material as the biological, and the primary focus of the class system is on the material as the economic; whereas their effective overlap takes place on the ground of the social, where the unalterability of biological difference, mollified by the solvent of gender analysis, meets the alterability of socioeconomic situation.

V

But there is a vital facet of the early modern system of sexuality that remains to be discussed. Because the criterion of difference rather than hierarchy is central to that system, it is tempting to see the early eighteenth-century emergence of gender difference as coextensive with the emergence of “heterosexuality,” which conceives sexual desire as normatively enacted between male and female, between different “genders.” But if this is so, then the early eighteenth century must also be the period in which emerged heterosexuality’s other, homosexuality. That is, the early modern shift from a sexual system of hierarchy to one of difference may be seen as a shift to the system of heterosexuality, reciprocally inseparable from its dialectical antithesis, homosexuality—which is therefore also a crucial part of the system.45

Current research provides some basis for this claim. Foucault located in the nineteenth century the transition from “sodomy,” defined as a category of behavior, to “homosexuality,” defined as a category of persons.46 Recent work, however, suggests that in England the change is signaled by the early eighteenth-century emergence of the molly and the London molly house.47 What distinguished the molly subculture from precedent sodomitical activity, Alan Bray has claimed, was precisely its coalescence as a visible social phenomenon. The palpability of this development, the coalescence of an alien culture both within and apart from the familiar London world, is suggested by a Restoration poem that traces the physical movements of the sexually ambiguous fop:

Now wait on Beau to his Alsatia,
A Place that loves no Dei Gratia;
Where the Undoers live, and Undone,
In London, separate from London;
Where go but Three Yards from the street,
And you with a new Language meet:  
Prig, Prigster, Bubble, Caravan,
Pure Tackle, Buttock, Purerest Pure.48

By elaborating its own distinctive conventions of speech, dress, and gesture, the molly subculture constituted itself as a distinctive social entity within a host culture whose intensified legal reprisals bespoke not so much increased hostility as, simply, increased
recognizability. And the public persecution of the behavior of the molly reinforced it, in turn, as an increasingly recognizable identity.

To the sociological understanding of identity formation may be added the intellectual rationale that facilitated it. In Bray’s words, “What had once been thought of as a potential in all sinful human nature had become the particular vice of a certain kind of people, with their own distinctive way of life.” The discrimination of the sodomite as a different sort of person, rather than as a person temporarily engaged in a detested activity, had inevitable implications for modern gender roles. Under the old regime, sodomy was condemned as an evil behavior indulged by a variety of men. Under the new regime, sodomy was condemned as coextensive with an evil mode of being, incompatible with masculine identity. Randolph Trumbach has argued that before the rise of the molly subculture, acceptably masculine behavior had entailed sexual relations with both women and adolescent males. After it, the modern gender role for men became solidified in the assumption that most men desired women, and that all masculine identity flowed from this desire. A formerly unified conception of male sexuality was thus divided: men no longer had sex both with boys and with women; they had sex either with females or with males. To put this another way, an age-structured system of “sodomy” had moved in the direction of a gender-structured system of “homosexuality.” On the basis of this sort of evidence, Trumbach has suggested that for eighteenth-century males there were two kinds of bodies (male and female) but three kinds of gender (masculine, feminine, and sodomite)—that the molly came to represent a third, hybrid gender role, one that combined male and female characteristics. But it might be more accurate to say that it is only through the emergence of this new gender role that the two “orthodox” genders simultaneously came into being as the normative choice of difference made intelligible by the alternative and negative choice of sameness.

The division of male sexuality entailed in this broad movement can be seen in the history of the word “effeminate.” In the seventeenth century, “effeminate” referred to two distinct kinds of sexual overindulgence both of which were marked by male ingratiations with the female: it referred to men who are like women (in the sense of sodomitical transvestism), and to men who like women (in the sense of being sexually obsessed with them). By the middle of the eighteenth century, an adult effeminate male was likely to be taken only in the former sense, as an exclusive sodomite or molly. The word “effeminacy” had ceased by then to be able to bear both senses because effeminacy was held to signify a desire to emulate women that was plainly incompatible with sexual desire for them. This can be seen in the mid-eighteenth-century attack on “all the Votaries of Sodom and Effeminacy,” which urged that “the manly and generous Britons, who yet survive, will take what I say into Consideration, and show themselves Friends to the FAIR SEX; by opposing all Inlets to the Sin of Sodomy, of which Man-Kissing is the very first. With this, all other Effeminacies should be abolished; and each Sex should maintain its peculiar Character.” In this formulation, ostensible difference is a precondition for authorized desire. Sodomy highlights this principle of difference because it is the negative instance that entails an ostensible similarity between men and women and that countenances similarity as the ground for desire.
VI

In the concrete specificity of historical experience, of course, it was not as simple as these “before and after” formulas would suggest. Recent research into sodomy trials and the social composition of the molly clubs has corrected a longstanding misapprehension that early modern sodomy was largely an affair of the nobility and gentry. Historians may perhaps be excused for this error, since it is widely reflected in the views of contemporaries themselves. Why should this have been so? To answer this question I will be obliged to pursue what I have called the “common labor” of sexuality and class into the territory where modern gender roles first begin to cohere in complex association with modern class categorization.

Under aristocratic patriarchy, the criterion of difference had the crucial but limited responsibility of ensuring the transmission of the patrimony through the male line, a responsibility that was fully consistent with same–sex behavior. Under modern patriarchy, the criterion of difference superintends sexual identity as such, proscribing same–sex behavior for all who would be deemed masculine. The last generation to conceive masculinity as permitting a relatively inclusive sexual behavior was dominated by the paradigmatically masculine figure of the aristocratic rake of the Restoration, personified most notably by the celebrated libertine John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. In one of his songs, Rochester acknowledges this inclusiveness with an elegant brutality that affords sexuality a telling social dimension:

Love a woman? You’re an ass!
’Tis a most insipid passion
To choose out for your happiness
The silliest part of God’s creation.

Let the porter and the groom,
Things designed for dirty slaves,
Drudge in fair Aurelia’s womb
To get supplies for age and graves.

Farewell, woman! I intend
Henceforth every night to sit
With my lewd, well–natured friend,
Drinking to engender wit.

Then give me health, wealth, mirth, and wine,
And, if busy love entrenches,
There’s a sweet, soft page of mine
Does the trick worth forty wenches.

In Rochester’s misogynist valediction, different–sex behavior is figured as the grim manual labor of menial servants who work their women to produce offspring. Sodomy is, by contrast, a supremely careless otium, suitably accessory to the gentlemanly Horatian retreat whose central pleasure is to “engender” not serviceable “supplies” but insubstantial “wit.”

During the next few decades, Rochester’s correlation of sodomy and aristocracy persists under the aegis of an increasingly definitive critique. This process may be figured as a dissection of the cadaver of male aristocracy, a division of
parts that no longer were felt to cohere in a single normative social type.\textsuperscript{60} Birth and worth were now surgically sundered. On the one hand, personal worth was relocated in the common woman, the repository of a normative honor that had been alienated from an undeserving male aristocracy and that would be apotheosized in the domestic virtues of the modern heterosexual family. This relocation was signalled by the way “honor” became, over the course of the seventeenth century, a common term for designating female chastity in its moralized enlargement.\textsuperscript{61} On the other hand, the degeneration of aristocratic genealogy—not birth, but sterility and corruption—was reembodied in the effeminate nonmale, the “unreproductive” sodomite. From the interstices of these two gender types, the feminine and the effeminate, would emerge the modern category of the masculine. And for a while, at least, both femininity and effeminacy made positive contributions to the definition of modern masculinity.\textsuperscript{62}

These complex developments can be documented in the literature of the period. Contemporaries record that in 1694, the younger son of an impoverished family, Beau Wilson, suddenly appeared on the London scene with an equipage whose splendor rivalled those of the greatest noblemen in the nation.\textsuperscript{63} In the years that followed, the mystery of Wilson’s extraordinary social elevation, which had preoccupied contemporaries, was solved by two narratives in two strikingly different ways.

In 1707 there appeared Delarivier Manley’s highly circumstantial account of a story told by an elderly gentlewoman who had been unjustly cast aside by a well-situated “She–Favorite” at court. The story concerns that same female courtier and her comparable ingratitude toward Beau Wilson. In Manley’s account, the unnamed courtier finds Wilson destitute; falls in love with him; and vows to raise his fortune to the level of his merit on the condition of utter secrecy. But when Wilson’s devotion urges him to make their love public, his courtier patronness arranges to have him murdered. Already becoming famous for \textit{romans a clef} of ingratitude in high places, Manley solves the mystery of Wilson’s upward mobility through a characteristic plot of commoner virtue seduced and destroyed by noble perfidy. The not–unprecedented gender reversal—making the elevated and corrupt seducer not a man but a woman—gives to the male victim an aura of feminine passivity and innocence.\textsuperscript{64}

Sixteen years later the mystery remains the same, but its solution has altered considerably. Wilson retains the “feminine” role, but now supposedly authentic letters between the principals reveal that his seducer is an unidentified nobleman, who has introduced the commoner simultaneously to astonishing luxury and to sodomy. A modulation of epistolary form into a third–person narration permits the anonymous author an explicit critique of the nobleman for unnatural love and misogyny, corruptions that here fill the role played in Manley’s heterosexual plot by ingratitude and perfidy. So, by means of this structural proximity to culturally familiar stories of aristocratic degeneracy, sodomy becomes closely associated with the corruptions of aristocracy. And as though mindful of the heterosexual plot model that provides the basis for this association, the author ends his narrative with the interpolated story of Clovis, a young woman impregnated by the nobleman and destroyed by his careless vanity even as the affair with Wilson is still active. Thus the nobleman’s bisexuality only justifies the plot device by which sodomitical and heterosexual cor-
ruption work to reinforce each other. Meanwhile, however, and despite his own misogyny, the effeminate commoner Wilson is tacitly ennobled by his foil relationship to the feminine commoner Clovis.65

Among the many sources that fed the early modern critique of aristocratic culture, there are some that must have played a special role in promoting the conjunction of aristocracy and sodomy. The general population decline of the later seventeenth century reduced the number of male births sufficiently to create a crisis in the highly visible inheritance patterns of the nobility, fueling widespread apprehension of aristocratic sterility and the failure of noble lineages.66 These same consequences could also be attributed to the moral and physical corruption of modern gentility. According to one tract, the corruption of gentle lineages results from several causes. First, "the French Pox," and the heteroerosexual debauchery by which it is spread, leave bodies that “are so much enervated, . . . that they beget a most wretched, feeble, and sickly Offspring: We can attribute it to nothing else but this, that so many of our antient Families of Nobles are of late extinct." Second, the traditional, spartan regimen for educating quality has been replaced of late by a method that treats boys as though they were girls:

The Boy, thus spoil'd, becomes Company for none but Women, and . . . when our young Gentleman arrives to Marriage; . . . what can be expected from such an enervated effeminate Animal? . . . what can we hope from so crazy a Constitution? But a feeble, unhealthy Infant, scarce worth the rearing . . . Thus, unfit to serve his King, his Country, or his Family, this Man of Clouts dwindles into nothing, and leaves a Race as effeminate as himself; who, unable to please the Women, chuse rather to run into unnatural Vices one with another, than to attempt what they are but too sensible they cannot perform.67

By this account, the corruption of the nobility is the generation of sodomy.68 In the logical extension of the patrilineal contempt for women as the mere conduit of male value, women drop out of the circuit altogether. What remains is the ironic apotheosis of an aristocratic dynasticism that has lost the very capacity to reproduce itself. But the connection between sodomy and the aristocracy was not always expressed in explicitly causal terms. The normative model of male aristocracy traditionally shared some of the standard markers of femininity—not only a fine luxuriance of dress, but also a softness and whiteness of complexion. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, these traits were being derided with reference both to the effete aristocrat and (in an almost insensible extension) to the depraved sodomite. One tract that connects the “Pretty Gentleman” to the molly subculture also associates him with the effeminacy of a refined gentility. In this economical formulation, the “Pretty Gentleman” is distinct from “common men” in the sense of both status and gender difference:

Observe that fine Complexion! Examine that smooth, that Velvety Skin! View that Pallor which spreads itself over his Countenance! Hark, with what a feminine Softness his Accents steal their Way through his half-opened Lips! Feel that soft Palm! . . . The Pretty Gentleman is certainly formed in a different Mould from that of Common Men, and tempered with a purer Flame. The whole System is of
a finer Turn, and superior Accuracy of Fabric, insomuch that it looks as if Nature had been in doubt, to which Sex she should assign Him.69

Here the ironic tone encourages us to see the molly as a parodic burlesque of the aristocrat. In another tract, the link between status and gender anomaly is so strongly felt that it entails an inversion whereby dressing like a woman runs the paradoxical risk of being mistaken for a commoner: “I am confident no Age can produce any Thing so preposterous as the present Dress of those Gentlemen who call themselves pretty Fellows: their Head—Dress especially, which wants nothing but a Suit of Pinners to make them down—right Women. . . . And yet with all this, the present Garb of our young Gentlemen is most mean and unbecoming. “Tis a Difficulty to know a Gentleman from a Footman, by their present Habits.”70 We find ourselves here in the midst of the social transition of which I have already spoken, the transition from the polemical regulation of social orders to that of gender difference. It is in these years that flamboyant male dress is being proscribed in favor of less “effeminate” clothing.71 In this particular passage, an increasingly antiquated status anxiety still has enough force to nourish a growing anxiety about gender, but the organizing dread of the upstart masquerading as quality has been overbalanced by dismay at the spectacle of quality caught in an involuntary devolution.

What is the social logic that informs the conjunction of sodomy and aristocracy during this period? Sodomy and aristocracy may be said to have analogous positions in the respective emergent systems of sexuality and class. On the one hand, a new standard of gender difference was achieved in part through the separation out of the limiting negative case for masculinity. On the other hand, the establishment of a new standard of social description was achieved in part through the critique of a corrupt and outmoded aristocracy. What aristocracy and sodomy shared was an increasingly anomalous status within their respective systems; or rather, what they shared was the function of establishing the regularity of those systems by the fact of their own anomaly.

Aristocracy was anomalous because it was a vestige of an increasingly obsolete status hierarchy—by definition not a class but an order—and it persisted into modernity like the relict of another world. Of course, these are not the formulations of contemporaries. But in their preoccupation with the enervation, the degeneracy, and the corruption of the nobility contemporaries addressed the crucially historical nature of the anomaly, which defined by its incipient anachronism the contrastive currency of class conflict. The proto—homosexuality of sodomy, on the other hand, functioned within the system of sexuality as a structural anomaly, bestowing on the difference between masculinity and femininity a normative coherence achieved through a mediating term that was at once both and neither.72

VII

During the first half of my period, effeminacy was still sufficiently detachable from sodomy to play a positive role—in part, at least, as an allusive marker of cultural gentility—in the experimental construction of masculine norms. In several early papers of The Tatler, Richard Steele and his correspondents provide a remark-
able instance of this sort of experimental undertaking, a minute and searching discrimination of the “distinct Classes” of men encountered at the London coffee houses. One of the striking features of this proto-sociological survey is the degree to which its focus is concentrated strictly on gender characteristics—to the exclusion, for example, of professional and status discriminants. This effect is achieved by characterizing the several male types largely according to their disparate relations to women. In other words, it is as though the general rule of patriarchy, by which women are defined in terms of their relation to the father and the husband, at this particular moment takes on a certain gender reciprocity.

The survey begins in the impulse to distinguish the “Gentleman” from the “Pretty Fellow,” and to subdivide the latter class into the “Coxcomb” and the “Fop.” However, subsequent efforts to substantiate and articulate the general category “Pretty Fellow” only produce separate instances that require their own distinct categories: the “very Pretty Fellow” (also designated the “Woman’s Man”); the “Smart Fellow” (whose sexual aggression and frequent recourse to the sword link him to the “Rake”); and “effeminate” “Persons of the Epicene Gender,” who never receive a categorial label but seem clearly to be mollies. What the survey provides is therefore less an orderly taxonomy than a fluid continuum of male gender types principally distinguished—with a delicate self-irony but also with painstaking care—by details in the extravagance of their dress and in the extremity of their ingratiating with women. In one sense, of course, order has already been imposed: although sexual preference is by and large explicit, none of these types is evidently bisexual. Yet their subtle multiplicity, the plasticity of the range in which they are discriminated, most of all the way the male ingratiating with the female is used to distinguish a range of acceptable types of masculinity—all these bespeak a comparatively open-ended investigation of what soon will begin to close down. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the “Pretty Fellow,” the “Pretty Gentleman,” and the “Fop” are uncompro- misingly denigrated in association with the sodomite.73

So, effeminacy made a surprisingly positive (if temporary) contribution to the early modern experimentation with masculinity. We are more familiar with the parallel role of femininity in this experiment—although recent work sometimes exaggerates the coherence and stability of early modern femininity itself.74 Inner virtue, the great alternative both to corrupt aristocratic honor and to corrupt Roman Catholic hierarchy, was at first gender neutral, and throughout the seventeenth century it was as likely to be associated with progressive male as with progressive female capacity.75 Only by the middle of the eighteenth century was inner virtue becoming established as a peculiarly feminine trait, increasingly to be associated with the refor- mative powers of domesticity. But the coalescence of domestic ideology was greatly complicated by, among other things, the institutionalization of female authorship. If the message of much eighteenth-century women’s writing was domesticating in its general import, the evident fact of women writing for publication and profit strikingly undercut that message. Still, the notion of female domestic virtue was sufficiently established by midcentury to provide, for the equally unstable category of masculinity, an ambivalently feminine ballast. The logic of this influence is clear enough. The idea of female virtue—the radical internalization of male honor—may be understood as one consequence of early modern cultural efforts to replace aristocratic no-
tions of value. And it is not surprising that projects to establish normative masculine roles should have poached upon feminine virtue even as they sought to establish a differential masculine standard of value. From this perspective, Richardson's impersonation of the virtuous Pamela Andrews and Fielding's characterization of the feminized Joseph Andrews are two sides of the same coin.

The type of the sentimental man in the early decades of the eighteenth century lent to the ungendered industrious virtue of Protestant descent a subtly feminine receptivity, and he pointed ahead to the cult of sensibility at midcentury. One appeal of aristocratic ideology had been its claim that inner virtue was visibly manifested in the external phenomena of rank, regalia, personal display, even complexion. In its preoccupation with the blush, the tear, and the involuntary somatic signs of deep feeling, the cult of sensibility attempted to reinvent this notion of the body as a system of socioethical signification in terms of a biological materialism that would evade the ideology of aristocratic privilege. Crucial to this effort, of course, was the conception of feminine virtue as internalized honor. Yet the notion of the woman of feeling never attained any currency. And the significance of the sensible Man of Feeling may be that, as a fully feminized hero, he strategically reclaimed a now recognizably feminine model of virtue as a distinctively male possession, incorporating the newly normative gender traits within what a patriarchal culture persisted in seeing as the normative sex.

The cult of sensibility was short-lived because masculinity was learning to elaborate its own, highly circumscribed mode of "public virtue," alternative but complementary to the private domestic virtue of women. The solidification of this masculine ideal was inhibited by the influence not only of positive, but also of misogynist, models of femininity. Modern male notions of value, for example, might seem on the face of it quite compatible with the antiaristocratic heroism of economic man at work in the marketplace. But in the eighteenth century, the pursuit of exchange value was still suspect, and it was customary to associate its object with traits of imaginative fantasy, passion, and hysteria that were figured as female. In his London journal of 1762–63, the young James Boswell overcomes this problem with disturbing ingenuity. Boswell's journal enacts his coming of age as a vacillation between alternative career choices that are also masculine stereotypes—the dour Scots lawyer, the character of a gentleman, the character of a soldier, the "man of consequence," the "man of pleasure," and the "man of economy." Boswell's tentative embrace of the role of the man of economy coincides with a crisis in his relationship with the actress Louisa, whom he has until now been pleased to consider a potential wife. The two plots are quite distinct; yet their momentary and highly metaphorized entanglement suggests that Boswell exploits one to facilitate the other. To be a man of economy is, for him, both alluring and anxiety-ridden. He reconciles himself to this role at the same moment that he decides to interpret Louisa's acceptance of his loan as the sign that she is not a potential wife but, on the contrary, an avaricious whore. Displacing onto the woman all that is distressing about the management of money, Boswell makes the man of economy a positive masculine character by detoxifying it of its feminine negativity.
Boswell achieves through elaborate rationalization what his culture was to establish as a commonplace, the public virtue of economic man. There is no doubt a real danger in exaggerating the rigidity and circumscription of modern gender roles—and institutions.79 If the modern family came to be conceived as the living heart of private human feeling and the citadel of authenticity against worldly encroachment and corruption, it served thereby the needs of economic man quite as fully as it did those of domestic woman. Nevertheless, it may be fair to say that in the nineteenth century, the idea of the masculine would accommodate itself more successfully to the normative figure of the Public Man, defined by his economic activity, his occupational status, and his heterosexuality.

VIII

Let me end with some reflections on the nature, scope, and consequences of the historical change that has been my subject. I hope it has been clear that I conceive the early modern emergence of gender difference as: 1.) A gradual and long-term process; 2.) An uneven process, that proceeded at widely different rates according to socioeconomic, regional, and cultural variations; 3.) An incomplete process, in the sense that the regime of difference has never replaced in any absolute fashion the regime of hierarchy, which persists in significant pockets or layerings of ideological belief and social practice over against what may be felt to be the standard modern system; 4.) A contradictory process, in which ideological argument and representation often cut across the intricate multiplicity of behavior.

Historical change conceived on this model has a complexity that frustrates ready assertion or generalization. This can be seen, for example, in the way the undeniably potent ideology of separate spheres has coexisted in modern times not only with a behavior, but also with a counterideology, that bespeaks the continued authority of the husband in the domestic realm. If, despite such constitutive complications, we nonetheless agree that fundamental change has occurred, we are confronted with the question of its large-scale implications. Liberal thought, which was born in the seventeenth century and quickly proceeded to infiltrate all modern institutions and discourses, is deeply implicated in the emergence of gender difference. What are its major consequences in this respect?

At a certain level of abstraction, liberal thought construes difference as political equality, and it conceives all formal human relations—marriage, political representation, corporate transactions—as contracts between equal and autonomous individuals. That is, the modern principle of equality in difference is paradoxical in that it posits difference as the premise of an essential sameness before the law. Now, it was clear from the outset that the revolutionary and antihierarchical principle of equality in difference was never meant to extend to women—or to unpropertied men. What it did do was create a new specter of equity entitlements which, however unreal, was effective in undermining the paternalistic system of customary entitlements that followed, in hierarchical tradition, from the basic assumption of inequality.
On the other hand, over the long term, the principle of equality in difference has been institutionalized in a network of reforms that are undeniably real and important—universal "manhood" suffrage, equal opportunity legislation, the reform of marriage law, etc. And developments like these have encouraged some to see in modern political democracy the progressive demise of male dominance, and hence of patriarchy. I think it is important to acknowledge the value of liberal accomplishments for many reasons—among them that we are thereby better able to see what they may, by their very success, also obscure. Liberal policy works through political and legal reform, projecting as the suppositional corollary of politicolegal equality the attainment of political justice, economic equity, and cultural tolerance. Our national experience has shown that this supposition is quite unwarranted. Yet the authority of liberal ideology has been powerful enough to project, as a perpetual promise, a phantom equality whose effect is to mystify the ongoing aggravation of real inequality, making it harder rather than easier to discern and reverse. We may sense in this disabling liberality a parallel with the idealism of alternative systems, like the commitment to the paternalistic protection of commoners and women that superintends patriarchalism. In this tendency of ostensibly benevolent intentions to obscure the adverse effects of domination can be seen a real continuity between the regime of difference and the regime of hierarchy, its embodiment of patriarchy in other terms.

In the end, the model of historical change with which I am working relies for its intelligibility on the idea of a sociocultural system that I have invoked from time to time. The modern regime of difference is systematic first of all in the way its terms saturate modern life, so that to explain it can only proceed by adducing a web of correspondence between overlapping levels of experience—political, social, economic, sexual, intellectual, cultural—rather than by arguing a one-way causal relationship. Indeed, at the center of this web is early modern division itself, whose inseparable components—the division of labor and the division of knowledge—imprint their character on all that follows. But second, and more important, the modern system of difference is systematic in the sense not of being absolute and irresistible, but of setting the terms in which—and also against which—we are obliged to conceive our possibility. It is therefore a determinant regime in that it establishes the outer limits of our experience, and it is under the aegis of difference that we formulate our efforts to go beyond it. This is to say not that the system cannot be breached—that, in the current formulation, all resistance is containable—but that it is the system that dictates the means of its own breachability. From a local perspective, developments of the past twenty-five years—the feminist movement, the gay and lesbian movements—may have the appearance of an authentic and permanent revolution against a formerly entrenched system of sexual difference. A longer view may suggest that what we have been living through exemplifies the creative perdurability of that system, its periodic, and thoroughly authentic, susceptibility to the promotion of its own alternative. To say this is not to despair of historical change, but to describe the way change takes place. For modern sexuality is systematic, finally, in that it embodies a delicately balanced and dynamic contradiction. To recur to the terms of my earlier argument: if modern cultural knowledge always stands at risk of a naturalizing takeover, it is the sheer authority of arguments from natural difference that makes the culturalizing dissolution of those arguments both powerful and inevitable.
NOTES

1. I am grateful to my colleagues Elin Diamond, Annie Janowitz, Cora Kaplan, and Carolyn Williams for helping me think about aspects of this argument.


20. Ibid., 22, 157–58.


25. See Ivan Illich, Gender (New York: Pantheon, 1982), chapters I and VI; Sander Gilman, Sexuality: An Illustrated History (New York: John Wiley, 1989), 4, 8, 168, 173, 174. Both these formulations of the nature of the change in how gender was conceived also differ substantially from that of Laqueur.


27. See Laqueur, Making Sex, 10–11, 148, 153.


33. For a highly suggestive discussion, within the twentieth-century context, of these and other issues with which I am concerned, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), Introduction (allowing for inevitable differences in the meanings attached to the crucial terms “gender,” “sex,” and “sexuality”).

34. On the transition from status to class in early modern England, see McKeon, Origins, 159–71.


40. The Gentleman’s Monitor: or, A Sober Inspection into the Vertues, Vices, and Ordinary Means, Of the Rise and Decay of Men and Families (1665), 261–62.


42. For a complex and striking example of such discourse, see Tatler, nos. 48, 96, 116, 151, 243; Steele and Addison, The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), nos. 15, 41, 57, 66, 73, 81, 104, 127, 129, 435 (1709–12). In many of these papers, the law of the land has been replaced by the far more volatile and intractable “law” of gender fashion.


44. For a trenchant reflection on these matters, see Anne F. Janowitz, “Class and Literature: The Case of Romantic Chartistism,” in Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, eds.

45. Henry Abelove has argued that because the substantial population increase in eighteenth-century England was largely the result of a rise in the fertility rate, it therefore entails an increase in the “inci-
dence” or “popularity” of cross-sex genital intercourse (“intercourse,” for short), which should be seen as a rise of heterosexuality parallel to the concurrent rise of capitalism owing to their common emphasis on “production”: see “Some Speculations on the History of ‘Sexual Intercourse’ During the ‘Long Eighteenth Century’ in England,” *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York: Routledge, 1992), 335–42. Ablove uses the demographic data of E.A. Wrigley, “Growth of Population,” to dispute Wrigley’s interpretation of the data. But it seems to me Ablove’s argument is flawed in several ways:

1. Despite Ablove’s account, Wrigley’s demonstration of a rise in the fertility rate depends principally on data that shows an increase not in the “incidence” or frequency of intercourse but in the average length of the period of marriage. This being the case, the claim of an increase in the “popularity” of intercourse presumes on the motives of those involved in a way that is both unwarranted and, given the available evidence, unlikely. (For a more plausible suggestion, see Snell, above, note 18).

2. Ablove’s conflation of the “incidence” and the “popularity” of intercourse both with each other and with increased fertility seems to me too easy a solution to the difficult problem of negotiating the relationship between quantitative data and human motives. A rise in fertility entails a rise in successful pregnancies, but traditional and theological attitudes were likely to decrease, if anything, the incidence of intercourse during pregnancy at this time: see Daniel Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness; or, Matrimonial Whoredom. . .* (1727), chapter 12; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*, abridged ed. (New York: Harper, 1979), pp. 176–77, 262, 312. If we proceed on the understanding that incidence necessarily implies popularity, we might well conclude that the eighteenth-century rise in fertility entails a rise in the popularity of pregnancy but (therefore) a decline in the popularity of intercourse.

3. Ablove’s direct correlation of heterosexual and capitalist “production” strikes me as unconvincing. Fertility and the reproduction of offspring are most “popular” not in capitalist cultures but, on the contrary, in “traditional” cultures where kinship ties are powerful, economic production is domestic, and the units of production and reproduction closely overlap. In capitalist cultures, production is organized outside the family, and possessive individualists are more likely to have to choose between having children, on the one hand, and goods, wealth, and economic well being, on the other. (On these matters see Alan Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1987], chapter 2). Snell’s research also suggests a more complicated relationship between heterosexual and capitalist “production”: only when capitalist innovation renders women unproductive in the public sphere are they forced to enter earlier into a dependent marital relationship, which results in a rise in reproduction. In short, the direct correlation of heterosexual and capitalist “production” persuades on the level of metaphor but not of human experience. The present essay can be seen as an effort to propose an alternative way of conceiving the relation between sexuality and socioeconomic relations in eighteenth-century England.


50. At the more local level of political culture, the recognizability of emergent “homosexuality” may have been aided by the widespread association of William’s court with sodomitical practices, especially after Mary’s death in 1694: see Dennis Rubini, “Sexuality and Augustan England: Sodomy, Politics, Elite Circles and Society,” in *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, ed. Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989), 349–81.


55. Trumbach has suggested that the emergence of the molly is a consequence of male anxiety regarding the relative equalization of male and female roles with which it is contemporary, a consequence that guaranteed that “there would remain a radical separation of male and female experience, no matter how far equality might go in other ways”: “Birth,” 140; see also “Sex,” 203. According to Trumbach’s analysis, the gender total was still limited to three at this time because for most of the eighteenth century it was still understood that women who had sexual relations with other women also desired men, so that their feminine gender status was not thereby endangered. This would begin to change toward the end of the century with the emergence of the social type of the sapphist. See Trumbach, “Sex,” 191–92; “Birth,” 139–40; “London’s Sapphists: From Three Sexes to Four Genders in the Making of Modern Culture,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 112–41, revised in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 111–36. See Trumbach’s review essay, “The Origin and Development of the Modern Lesbian Role in the Western Gender System: Northwestern Europe and the United States, 1750–1990,” in *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques*, 20 (1994): 287–320.

56. At the same time, of course, the apprehension of “effeminacy” in eighteenth-century England was a very general mode of social analysis that articulated a wide range of convictions, from the traditional ideology of civic humanism to the innovative ideology of sensibility: for a broad survey see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), chapter 3.


60. Needless to say, the death of aristocracy as a cultural norm was quite consistent with its continued vitality as a social group.

61. See McKeon, *Origins*, 157–58. Among the gentry, this enlargement entailed an “inheritance” of the duties of charity and care for the poor formerly proper to the aristocratic pater familias.

62. As Kristina Straub has shown, the figure of the dramatic player is an acute index to the instability of gender categories in the eighteenth century: see *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992). For a different, but comparably suggestive, approach to the same subject, see Lynne Friedli, “Passing Women—A Study of Gender Boundaries in the Eighteenth

63. For contemporary accounts, see Rousseau, "An Introduction," 48–53.

64. See [Delarivier Manley], The Lady's Packet of Letters, appended to Marie Catherine D'Aulnoy, Memoirs of the Court of England in the Reign of King Charles II, 2d ed. (1708), 3–24. Compare Manley's Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians (1703) and Secret Memoirs ... From the New Atlantis (1709). For the gender reversal, compare Aphra Behn, The Fair Jilt (1696). For attempts to illuminate the ideology of these plots in Manley and Behn, see McKeon, Origins, 232–33, 258–60, 263.


66. See McKeon, Origins, 153.

67. Satan's Harvest Home, 33, 49–50. In its account of a "race" of men acculturated into sodomy, this story exhibits the contradictory doubleness of the modern system of sexuality. The emphasis on the central role of education in the constitution of the sodomite both abets the emergent notion of sodomy as a matter of persons rather than actions, and augments the emergent sociological insight (compare Mandeville, note 32) that persons are socially constructed.

For an analysis related to that of this tract, see [Lancaster] Pretty Gentleman, 14, 31. For ideologically diverse accounts of the degeneration of the English gentry and nobility into a soft "effeminacy," see Daniel Defoe, Review, III, no. 10 (January 22, 1706); "Mrs. Crackenthorpe," The Female Tatler, no. 5 (July 15–18, 1709); Jonathan Swift, Intelligencer, no. 9 (1728); [John Brown] An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times, 2d ed. (London, 1757), 30 and passim.

68. The causes of this corruption are for the most part English; but it is notable that the author adds to the French pox the metaphorically contagious "Contagion" of men kissing each other and the opera's "Corruption of the English Stage," both of which are of Italian extraction (Satan's Harvest Home, 51, 55).

69. [Lancaster] Pretty Gentleman, 25–26. Lancaster is at pains to explicitly associate with sodomy the foppish Friable in Garrick's recently produced Miss in Her Teens (1747).

70. Satan's Harvest Home, 50. The passage is unusual in maintaining a balance between status- and gender-related sumptuary concerns (see note 35).

71. In the formulation of J.C. Flugel, this is "the great masculine renunciation": see The Psychology of Clothes (London: Hogarth Press, 1930).

72. However, the aristocracy may also be said to have functioned as a structural anomaly—as a term mediating between an emergent middle class and an emergent working class—in the sense that it not only was neither of these but also partook of both of them. On the one hand, an influential strain of aristocratic conservatism anticipated and articulated an anticapitalist ideology that it self- consciously linked to the protoproletarian interests of the laboring poor. On the other hand, from the beginning the ideology of the middle class has been defined in part by the self-canceling impulse to assimilate upward. Indeed, in its oscillation between the will to assimilate and the will to supersede the aristocracy, the middle class has displayed the ambivalence—the intertwined attraction and repulsion—that we have come to associate with modern critique of homossexuality. In the terms of this argument, the conservative exposure of antiaristocratic progressive ideology as stealthily celebrating the rise of a "new aristocracy" is analogous to theouting of the homophobe. On anticapitalism, assimilationism, supersessionism, and the "new aristocracy," see McKeon, Origins, 162, 171, 174.


74. Nancy Armstrong's claim that the modern category of subjectivity is gendered feminine at the outset is not borne out by the evidence—either that of the early novel or that of other discourses: see


77. However, J.G.A. Pocock makes an unwarranted inference (and generalization) from this association in claiming that in the eighteenth century, economic man "was seen as on the whole a feminized, even an effeminate, being": see "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology," in Virtue, Commerce, and History (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 114.


79. For recent evidence to this effect, see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987).