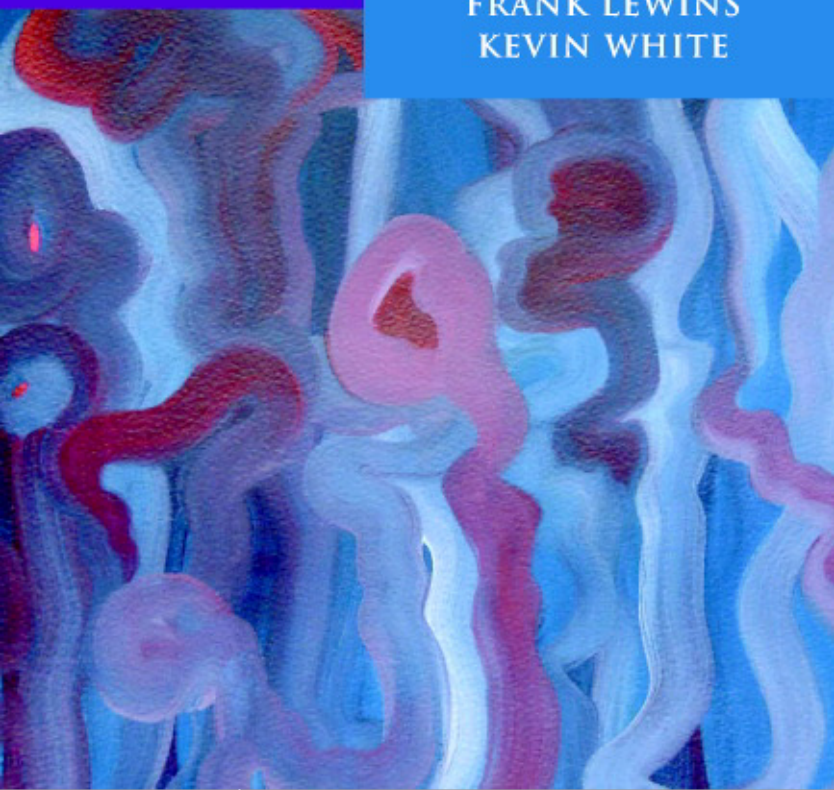


INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

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Inequality in Australia

Inequality in Australia analyses and explains inequality, challenging traditional conceptions and providing a new critical perspective. The authors provide a comprehensive historical account of inequality, and show how that account no longer adequately explains the new and different forms experienced in recent decades.

They argue that transformations in industrial, familial and political relations since the 1970s must be taken into account when trying to come to grips with the 'new' inequalities. Because society has changed, there is now a need to recombine the notions of class, gender and ethnicity and embed them in the body, the self and politics.

Inequality in Australia is at once a critical overview of contemporary inequality and a thoroughgoing textbook suitable for undergraduates. It contains review questions, a critical further-reading guide, summaries of key terms and concepts, and boxed studies throughout.

Alastair Greig, Frank Lewins and Kevin White teach in the School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.

Inequality in Australia

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Parts of this book draw on previously published work. The discussion of transsexualism in chapter 7 owes a debt to *Transsexualism in Society* (Lewins 1995), and we thank Macmillan for permission to use this material. Elements in chapter 6 are derived from McKay and Lewins (1978). Also, the arguments in chapters 2, 3 and 4 are related to, and more fully developed in White, K. (2002a).

1 Introduction

At an early stage of our childhood development we all probably cried: ‘That’s not fair!’ It might have referred to a feeling that one of our siblings had been apportioned more of a good than us; or that one of our friends was allowed to stay up later than us; or that we were not allowed to watch a televised event when someone else was. Regardless of the context, these illustrations reveal that at a very early age we become conscious of the way resources or favours are distributed unevenly, or at least in ways that do not accord with our needs or wants, or with what we perceive as our rights.

These experiences or feelings of inequality remain with us as we pass through the process of childhood socialisation and enter adulthood. While our earlier feelings might have focused on dimensions of inequality relating to age, later we can experience these same feelings in a range of ways, from gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, religion and class. We often become more conscious of these dimensions as we grow apart from childhood friends. Some of us develop means for justifying why some people receive more than others; some resign themselves to the situation that the world as we experience it cannot be changed; others maintain a passionate belief that resources should and can be distributed more equally.

Controversies surrounding inequality manifest themselves most overtly at the political level, and towards the end of this book this level will be explored in more depth. However, before we attempt to reinterpret some recent Australian political debates surrounding inequality, we want to suggest that inequality affects us at more personal levels as well, or to put it another way, that the politics of inequality affects the way we perceive our bodies and construct our identities.

This claim – that inequality affects the very core of our being, the way we look upon ourselves, the way others look upon us, the way we experience and

relate to others and the way we act upon the world – has helped shape the organisation of this book around three broad domains: inequality and the body (part 1); inequality and the self (part 2); and politics and inequality (part 3).

Why a new look at inequality?

Our central claim is that, in attempting to explain the persistent structures and the transformations of social inequality, a new approach is necessary. Approaches that might have been appropriate from the turn of the century until the 1970s cannot adequately explain transformations experienced in western industrial societies such as Australia over the past few decades.

In our ‘holistic’ approach we have drawn links between three facets of inequality: the sociological approaches to it (theory), the extent of individuals’ experiences of it (self-experience), and the evidence for its existence (empirical reality). These links are central for understanding not only contemporary patterns of social inequality, but also their history. Although related to matters concerning the body, self-experience is analytically separate in that it incorporates individuals’ understandings of themselves and their place in the wider social context. Often covered by the term *self-identity*, self-experience, as we use this term, is a ‘constellation of characteristics’ (van Krieken et al. 2000:8) that includes notions such as personal experience and the meanings people attribute to specific social situations, self-understanding and consciousness. These conceptions of the self are not unique to any individual or moment in history, for they are often patterned or structured and are changing.

The advantage of our approach to inequality is that it captures more accurately the lived experience of social agents. Although we acknowledge the empirical realities associated with the class, race and ethnicity of individuals, explaining their patterns of inequality involves more. It involves demonstrating not only how these major concepts interact in people’s lives, but also how they are involved in wider social change that includes individuals’ changing patterns of consciousness of facets of their lives. This focus therefore claims a close relationship between how sociologists attempt to describe inequality and how individuals in general perceive the circumstances of a changing world. This wider, more dynamic approach is evident in the chapters addressing the broad domains of the body, the self and politics. Their similarities, in terms of acknowledging the relationship between theory, experience and empirical reality, contribute to the explanation of how new forms of inequality emerge and old ones recede. Our attempt systematically to relate the broad domains of the body, the self and politics to theory, experience and empirical reality is thus, in effect, the filling in of the nine cells so created (see figure 1.1).

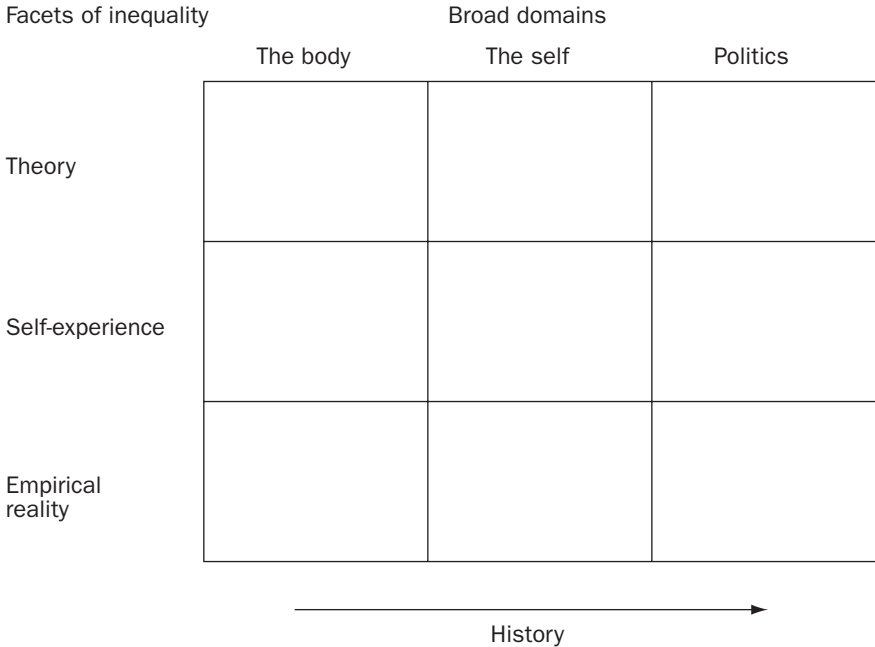


Figure 1.1 The broad picture of *Inequality in Australia*

Another way of grasping our claim that the approach adopted in this book captures more accurately the lived experience of social beings is to think of theory, self-experience and empirical reality as three zones in a triangle. An adequate account of social inequality must acknowledge all three and their interrelations (see figure 1.2). This important point needs to be stressed because we are not saying that theory based on self-experience and individual meanings is an alternative to social structural explanations, a claim found among poststructuralist sociology (see Bradley 1996:1–10). Instead, these elements complement each other to provide a more holistic explanation of social inequality. Also, on a different front, failure to acknowledge self-experience helps perpetuate one of the major puzzles of studies in this area. Why is it that inequalities in areas that most affect our life chances are often not perceived as important by those most affected?

This ‘silence’ of individuals most affected by patterned inequality suggests that an important domain of evidence has hitherto not been given due recognition. In addressing this gap, apart from examining forms of inequality that go beyond the familiar focus on life chances, we examine the role of individual consciousness in understanding inequality. Before turning to the following chapters, it is important briefly to state why we should want to include individual consciousness in our approach to inequality.

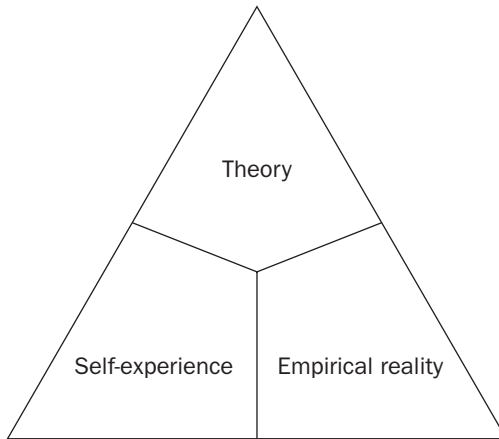


Figure 1.2 The relationship of sociological theory, self-experience and empirical reality

The explanation of any instance of social inequality has five facets: (1) whether inequality *exists* in a particular social setting; (2) the *nature of the structure* of that inequality; (3) the factors *producing* it; (4) the factors *maintaining* it; and (5) the *effects* of that inequality. Our approach attempts to address all five of these areas. Earlier works are valuable in providing a historical benchmark for the structure of inequality, and their detailed descriptions provide an important comparison when it comes to an examination of the current situation in Australia.

Our argument is that the role of self-experience is especially crucial in explaining the maintenance of social inequality. Where individuals have no consciousness of certain inequalities, then that ‘silence’ helps perpetuate their situation. By way of illustration, take the case of individuals who are shown to be slowly dying because they have been ingesting harmful compounds in their water supply. If they do not see their water supply as contaminated or, more to the point, if they see themselves as ‘healthy and normal’, then that state of consciousness helps explain why their situation persists. By contrast, where individuals have some consciousness of certain inequalities that impinge on their lives, the nature of that consciousness or their definition of the situation becomes a crucial part of our understanding of the situation. If people believe, for example, that poverty is their ‘lot’ in life – that is, a consequence of their own individual misfortunes – then they are more likely to be resigned to continuing poverty, compared to the political activist who sees poverty as structured inequality that is contingent on other factors and able to be changed.

This type of example is well-known to sociologists because it illustrates an important distinction Mills (1959) makes in *The Sociological Imagination*. In

the former situation, ‘private troubles’ are seen as specific to those individuals and, therefore, less amenable to change. By contrast, where poverty is viewed, as Mills would have it, as a ‘public issue’, then it is potentially also a political issue and capable of alteration. The more individuals experience social inequality as private troubles rather than as public issues, the more we are able to pinpoint a key factor to explain the maintenance of that inequality. Despite Mills’s contribution to a way of approaching sociology, it is perhaps surprising that more attention has not been paid to the role of individuals’ experiences of inequality.

The importance of the social

Australia is now more unequal than at any stage of its past. As Travers and Richardson (1993:72) point out,

The richest 1% of the adult population owns about 20% of private wealth; the richest 10% own half the wealth and the poorest 30% have no net wealth (although they may own consumer durables and a car).

Yet most Australians would still claim to live in an egalitarian society, and claim that they personally do not experience inequality and indeed are middle class (McGregor, C. 1997). This book explores this paradox, and provides evidence of the extensive inequality at the heart of Australian society. We also analyse how it is that patterns of inequality in Australia are maintained, and in particular what it is about people’s experiences that contributes to the ongoing patterns of inequality.

We argue that Australian perceptions of their society as equal and egalitarian are built on three interlocking myths. They are the myth of the natural body, the myth of the autonomous self, and the myth of egalitarianism in Australian history. The three parts of the book address these myths. Using the three broad domains of the body, the self and politics, our major concern is to show that things we take for granted in daily life, and often assume to be natural or inevitable aspects of our lives, are in fact shaped by powerful social forces, especially class, gender and ethnicity.

The book explores the interactions between the ways in which sociologists conceptualise and analyse society, the empirical reality of Australian social life, and individuals’ perceptions of society. New understandings and experiences of inequality are the outcome of the transformation of the organisation of industrial, familial, ethnic and political relations. The concepts sociologists adopted from the turn of the century until the 1970s cannot adequately explain the profound transformation of experience in Australia over the past few

decades. Equally the empirical realities associated with individuals' class, gender and ethnicity are experienced differently from those of forty years ago. The organisation of work, of the social roles associated with men and women, and continuing arrivals of people from other countries have transformed old forms of inequality and produced new forms.

In part 1 we deal with the myth that our bodies are parts of nature and exist independently of social life. Chapter 2 charts the way in which sociologists and anthropologists have demonstrated that rather than being part of nature, our bodies – and how we understand them – are historically and socially produced. As society changes, so too do sociological concepts change to take into account new social relationships. The important change in western industrialised societies has been their relative deindustrialisation, with many multinational companies moving their production plants to countries with lower labour costs. This has meant that the dominant form of social life from the 1930s to the 1970s – stable employment over the adult life cycle, with identity conferred on individuals by their place in the occupational hierarchy, living in stable communities and with politics aligned with the division between labour and capital – has been transformed. With the growth of the service sector, many Australians are now in occupations that are based in information technology, with high degrees of uncertainty about their work, are geographically more mobile, and are constantly reconstructing their biography in the light of changed jobs and places of living.

Sociologists such as Giddens (1991), Beck (1992) and Bauman (1992) argue that these changes have 'freed' us from the old patterns of inequality produced by industrial life, that we remake our biographies as we choose, and that our bodies, liberated from factory production, can now be remade as we choose. We argue that this is over-optimistic and document how the patterns of inequality laid down in the industrial period still dominate, especially in terms of our bodily health and the workplace. Life chances, especially in health, are the product of social circumstances and not individual lifestyle or biology. That we take them to be natural, individually based, or genetically structured means that we take for granted the profound inequalities that Australian society produces in the distribution of health and illness. In chapter 3 we explore the socioeconomic inequalities that profoundly shape the experience of health and disease. Put simply, members of the lower socioeconomic groups have sicker, shorter lives. Furthermore, Australia loses more than a million years of productive life per annum from the burden of disease – that is, the measure of preventable deaths and preventable accidents leading to disability. This figure is no surprise given the scant regard for public health in this country where less than 2 per cent of the gross domestic product is spent on public health.

Nowhere is the naturalness of unequal social experiences more ingrained than in the idea that the roles that men and women fulfil are natural. In chapter 4 we show that women are constructed as sick in medical conceptions of them, placing them under constant medical surveillance, and exhorting them to have ongoing check-ups and evaluation. They thus appear naturally sicker and are over-represented in the statistics on health-care use. While constructed as sickly in comparison to men, their reproductive capacity is extended to assert that because women bear children they should care for them, that indeed caring is part of their natural constitution. Recent government policies have built on this assumption and have used it in the context of deinstitutionalisation to make women take care of the ageing and disabled. Furthermore, in ways that will carry socioeconomic inequalities into retirement, the government is placing more and more responsibility on the elderly to rely on their own resources, or on those of their family.

In part 2 we examine the understandings of the self into which we are socialised in contemporary Australian society. We seek particularly to explore individuals' understandings of and accounts of social reality. In this we analyse recent theoretical arguments in sociology, which state that with the changes to industrialised society each individual is now freer to make choices about their self and its expression. This argument is developed by many postmodernists, who argue that individuals have the capacities to choose their own identities and priorities in life, and by extension their own life chances (chapter 5). We challenge this position on empirical grounds. Using a variety of materials, we show that the self with and into which we grew up is not the product of free choice, but is profoundly shaped by experiences in education, the families and the communities we live in. Even the language we use to make sense of the social world is differentially distributed, as we show in a discussion of Aboriginality in chapter 7, and reflects inequalities of access to education and opportunities to construct ourselves that are dependent on factors such as income and status. As these factors have changed over the past forty or so years, so too has the experience of inequality that they produce.

Rather than celebrate the new individualism in the postmodernist approach, we will show that individuals in a variety of social contexts with varying selves are still dependent on a wide range of social goods and capital. These are provided to them not by virtue of their own choosing, or of their ambitions or abilities, but by structural features of social life. We continue to explore such postmodernist arguments in chapter 5. Claims of the fading of the importance of occupation, wealth and income as dimensions of inequality and the emergence of consumption as the new form of self-identity will be examined. Specifically, the evidence will demonstrate new types of structured inequality,

such as the variable capacity of individuals to be able to imagine and articulate identity choices. While postmodernist approaches overlook the macrostructural determinants of identity, other Australian work on inequality overlooks the role of individual consciousness. It is only by taking into account individuals' understandings of inequality that we can lay out explanations of its continuity.

The issue of fully taking into account individuals' self-understandings of inequality is pursued in chapter 6, where we examine in detail issues of ethnic consciousness and Aboriginal identity. Starting with migrants, we argue that their presumed ethnicity in earlier research has led to an approach that emphasises ethnicity as a primordial category conferring all aspects of identity on migrant groups. We emphasise the political nature of expressions of ethnicity and its links with inequality, in particular viewing ethnicity as a process. Aborigines are examined as a separate case, consistent with our claim that individuals' experiences must be incorporated in any analysis of inequality. Because Aboriginal people consistently deny that they have anything in common with migrants and that Aboriginality can be equated with ethnicity, they warrant separate scrutiny. We will explore the consequences of understanding Aboriginal inequality by examining the varieties of Aboriginality, for there is no overarching concept of Aborigines and no singular self-identity. Central to understanding Aboriginality is the role of white Australian institutions in shaping not only wider perceptions of Aboriginality, but also Aborigines' self-identity, and its links with inequality.

Just as ethnicity and Aboriginality are not fixed concepts or realities, neither is gender (chapter 7). It is only by taking into account individuals' lived experiences of gender identity that we can clearly see the ways in which it is a negotiated reality. However, we are careful not to dissolve gender identity to the level of complete voluntarism, and in a case study of transsexualism show how individual choice is restricted and defined by a wide range of structural variables.

Our analyses of the body and the self have been carried out to demonstrate that they are social, political and gendered accomplishments. The body is the intersection of biology and social structure, and its sicknesses and diseases are socially produced and distributed unequally. Our selves, too, are the product of social life. We are not the independent, autonomous agents that our socialisation would lead us to believe. How we experience our selves is shaped by our ethnicity, our access to social goods such as education, our position in the labour market, and our gender. These experiences lay fundamental parameters around who we are, and who we can choose to be. So too do the historical processes that lie behind the present.

In part 3 we turn to how Australia's development, and the myths that go with it, have shaped and continue to shape inequality.

The importance of history

If, as the previous section suggested, an adequate understanding of inequality needs to take into consideration its social context, it is also necessary to contextualise inequality historically. This is the principal claim of part 3. Many studies provide us with valuable information relating to inequality at a particular point in time. However, while these historical snapshots might provide us with a wealth of empirical data, by themselves they cannot reveal much social significance unless they are placed in historical perspective. This is because a person's experience of and attitude towards inequality is dependent upon their ability to draw comparisons with the past. Our elders often note that conditions and attitudes that are intolerable today were unreflectively considered normal only a few decades ago. Throughout this book many such examples will be illustrated, such as marriage bars on women's entrance to specific areas of employment, and citizenship bars on people with specific racial characteristics. The social significance of inequality includes consciousness of how things were before the present. This observation does not apply only to our contemporary experience of rapid social and technological change. In *Democracy in America*, written in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville (quoted in Hughes, R. 1994) wrote that:

Men will never establish any equality with which they will be contented ... When inequality of condition is the common law of society, the most marked inequalities do not strike the eye; when everything is nearly on the same level, the slightest are marked enough to hurt it. Hence the desire for equality always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete.

In these lines, de Tocqueville manages elegantly to capture the social and historical contexts that guide our approach to inequality. By approach, however, we do not mean that we slavishly follow de Tocqueville's philosophy of history, or anyone else's for that matter.

Although on one level de Tocqueville's lines might provoke the response that if inequality is so historically relative then there is little point in appreciating the way in which it becomes transformed, we argue that this would fail to take into consideration the importance of personal experience and its relationship to political struggles or, to use Mills's phrase again, between 'private troubles' and 'public issues'. This 'sociological imagination', he argued, 'enables us to grasp history and biography and the relation between the two within society' (Mills 1973:12). Mills's claim goes deeper than the warning that those who ignore history are condemned to repeat its mistakes. His statement, which tends to emphasise the importance of consciousness, is a plea to social theorists, and even practising revolutionaries, that an understanding of

social conditions requires a sharp ‘historical imagination’. While this is one ‘point’ of our triangular framework, history has another more empirical ‘point’ – preceding social negotiations and struggles invariably shift the parameters within which later understandings of inequality operate. In other words, at any time our appreciation of any specific dimension of inequality is dependent on the social compromises that preceding configurations of social forces negotiated or enforced. This highlights another aspect of the historical imagination that coincides with the sociological imagination – at a particular point in time, any set of unequal social relations is based on a historically contingent balance of political forces, rather than some natural state.

The study of inequality is therefore relational in more than one sense. While we usually acknowledge that inequality must by definition be measured between people or social categories, its significance also depends on its measure across time. If an adequate understanding of inequality needs to take into account historical context and if our perceptions of inequality are historically relative, then it is always a good time to take a new look at inequality.

This historical dimension is emphasised most strongly in the third and final part of the book, which examines the politics of inequality in Australia. Chapter 8 begins by returning to the question of why inequality persists, and focuses on the construction of social and political values at the level of nationality. After discussing some of the racial myths of white invasion and white settlement, the chapter charts the pervasive and persistent myth of egalitarianism. We use the concept of myth to refer to a ‘systematic organization of signifiers around a set of connotations and meanings’, rather than referring to something that is ‘untrue’ (Fiske, Hodge and Turner 1987:xi). From this perspective, it matters little whether Australia can be measured as more or less egalitarian at any particular time. What counts is the impact that the myth has upon people’s consciousness of their situation.

Chapter 8 charts the path of these signifiers through the nineteenth-century myth of ‘a workingman’s paradise’ through to the post-World War II affluent ‘Australian way of life’ and the ‘lucky country’ in the 1960s. Throughout these periods, popular literature and intellectual discourse invariably listed fairness and egalitarianism as attributes of the Australian character and psyche. Many an academic life was devoted to the search for the origins of this egalitarian symbolism in various times and places, ranging from convict settlement to the bush, the frontier, the workplace and the battlefield. At the end of chapter 8, we note how many of the political, social, cultural and economic certainties that sustained this vision of the national character began to crumble towards the end of the twentieth century, an issue to which we return in chapter 10.

Before exploring contemporary debates on egalitarianism and inequality, however, chapter 9 explores in more detail the claim that until quite recently

this quest for the origins of egalitarianism was blind to both gender and race. The chapter explores the struggles for a more egalitarian society in the fields of wage equality, gender equality and cultural equality. After explaining the structural inequality at the heart of labour-market relationships, the first section of the chapter follows the efforts of the organised workers' movement for state intervention in the labour market. The extent to which the movement was able to enshrine state-arbitrated 'fairness' into the Australian industrial-relations system at the time of Federation placed it in the forefront of global progress. Yet these workers' struggles were focused on improving the conditions of white male breadwinners and marginalised those on the periphery or outside the labour market. In the second section of the chapter, the struggle by women to extend their citizenship status from motherhood to workplace is charted. We note how, under the stable conditions of postwar prosperity, women were able to use the state to pull down many of the discriminatory barriers that limited their full participation as equal citizens. The third and final section of the chapter fulfils a parallel function with respect to the struggle by non-British migrants for equal citizenship status, and ends with a discussion on the relationship between multicultural policy and different meanings of equality, an issue that took on greater prominence during the 'culture wars' of the 1990s, which are analysed in chapter 10. We conclude that struggles for equality along these dimensions are in a constant state of flux and that previous historical compromises shift the parameters of those that follow. In this sense, the prize of equality, as de Tocqueville observed, is a moving target.

Chapter 10 begins with an exploration of the structural changes that transformed the Australian economy during the last decades of the twentieth century. Ironically, these changes began to be felt throughout all areas of Australian life at a time when the organised workers' movement had achieved what appeared to be a position of high influence within national policy-making. However, this experience left the union movement numerically and politically weaker. The reasons for this transformation were manifold, and the chapter explores the impact that the greater opening of the Australian economy to world markets has had on employment, government policy and inequality. The impact of technological change is also explored, along with the claim that a new divide is emerging between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor', and that this divide has also affected political behaviour. The second half of the chapter then examines a range of cultural wars that dominated Australian political debate during the 1990s, and critiques the claim that the nation has become increasingly divided between a highly educated cosmopolitan elite and ordinary battlers. This argument, we claim, underestimates other dimensions of inequality that have persisted throughout Australia's federal history. It has also overestimated the ideological, political and social homogeneity of this educated category.

Regardless of the empirical reality of this new divide, we show that it had an enormous influence on the political culture of the 1990s, ranging from multiculturalism, Aboriginal land rights, national identity, the republic, equal-opportunity legislation, welfare and what we describe as a backlash against the inroads, discussed in chapter 9, that various social categories had made in their struggles against inequality. These debates reveal that the myth of egalitarianism is alive and well in the twenty-first century, even if inequalities are demonstrably widening along various dimensions. It can be demonstrated that even those who seek to wind back gains made by the workers', women's and cultural movements over the past century express their politics in the language of equality. To clarify this apparent contradiction, where all political sides seem to be fighting for equality, it is necessary to end this introductory chapter with a brief discussion of the forms that equality can assume.

Turner (1986:34–6) notes that when people use the term equality they are usually referring to one of four forms of equality. The first is the *ontological claim* that all humans are born equal, a claim made, for example, by Rousseau, who began his discourse on equality by noting, 'Man is born equal, yet everywhere is in chains'. A corollary to this is the claim that humans or categories of humans are born unequal, a position in a variety of guises that we confront throughout the book. The second type of equality, *equality of opportunity*, refers to the claim that all people's social status should be based on their commitment and abilities, such as educational achievement or hard work. The ideal society in this view is a meritocracy, where ability and effort are to be justly rewarded. The third type refers to *equality of conditions*, where the argument is made that as far as possible neither disadvantage nor advantage should be inherited. In other words, equality of opportunity (the second type) is undermined unless measures are taken to ensure that each person or social category starts under the same conditions. When racehorses are handicapped, race organisers are trying to ensure equality of condition. The fourth type of equality, *equality of outcomes*, is those practices and policies introduced by governments to ensure that other things being equal, representatives of specific groups are placed ahead of members of other already successful groups. The clearest examples are programs for positive discrimination that operate in some countries to advance women and members of ethnic minorities. Summing up the relationship between these forms, Bryan Turner (1986:36) notes that measures for equality of outcome are 'meant to compensate for significant inequalities of condition in order to bring about a meaningful equality of opportunity to secure an equality of result'.

As noted earlier, in our discussion of recent political debates over equality we argue that the myth of egalitarianism is still being played out even by those who wish to roll back the gains made by certain social categories in the name

of equality. We label their definition of equality *formal equality*, in the sense that equality can exist legally without the capacity of individuals and social categories to exercise their rights. To employ Turner's typology, formal equality can resemble an empty form of the equality of opportunity and can often lead the disadvantaged to blame themselves for their lack of success in a meritocratic society. On the other hand, we point out that the struggles to extend citizenship rights and equality by workers, women's and cultural movements often are conducted under the banners of equality of condition or equality of outcome, forms of equality that we link together as *substantive equality*.

In summary, this book documents the range and forms of inequality in contemporary Australia. We have tried to convey the lived experience of this inequality on individuals – how it shapes their bodies, their selves and their participation in political life. In doing this we have developed a historical perspective of the changing nature of and debates over what it is that constitutes inequality. Although many new forms of inequality have developed since the 1970s, many old ones persist. We thus caution against the temptation of post-modern social theory to celebrate the decline of the industrial West as the offer of new freedoms. Class, gender and ethnicity may be modernist concepts, but they are still empirical realities that constrain individuals' life chances and experiences. We have not been set free to choose our health or our gender, or to rewrite our biographies as we want. Equally, new patterns of work and familial relationships are generating new forms of inequality, particularly around age, and increasing the burden placed on women and the voluntary sector to care for them. At the beginning of the twenty-first century there is a powerful backlash against the struggles for equality that have shaped Australians and their lives since World War II. This book provides a perspective on what was achieved in that period, and on what is now happening.

Part 1

**The Body Society
and Inequality**

2 Inequality and the Sociology of the Body

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Within western societies our bodies have been conceptualised by the medical and biological sciences as part of **nature** and have been thought to exist independently of society. But what the **body** is, and how it is classified and experienced, can also be explained and understood from a social perspective, which lays stress on the social distribution and production of our bodies. In this chapter we show how the body is socially shaped and moulded, and how as well as being a physical fact, it is a social fact. In developing an argument that the body is a social artefact, rather than purely biological one, we will be concerned to show how our bodies and our knowledge of them are unequally shaped by the social structures in which we live. We will show how biological explanations of the body are used in daily life to legitimate specific views of society and to justify the ‘naturalness’ of inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, disability, age and the sense of ‘otherness’ they give rise to (Marcovich 1982).

If the biological model of the body were totally taken for granted, then sociological questions about its shaping and about our experience of it in social relationships could not be raised. Different bodies would be the inevitable outcome of largely uncontrollable natural forces. It is because we know that bodies – of men and women, of children and indigenous peoples, of the elderly and the differently abled – are socially produced and sustained that it is the focus of so many contemporary social groups. As Bryan Turner (1996:1) has argued, we now live in what can be called a ‘somatic society’ where ‘major political and personal problems are both problematised within the body and expressed through it’. The body has become a resource in political struggles, has become a ‘body politic’, to use Elshtain’s (1995) phrase, around issues of inequality, especially for women’s bodies, disabled bodies and aged bodies (see chapter 4). Our concern is also with the lived body as the site and source of images of our participation in society – whether it is the sculpted body of the gym, or the consumer body of the clothing label.

We are all aware of the way that inequality is embodied, sometimes not consciously (as we illustrate in the section on ‘The micro-politics of inequality’, p. 19), and we work to use our bodies to signal our position in social hierarchies. This may be in terms of consumption patterns, class membership or gender identity, or to signal our adherence to normality or our active membership of society as self-responsible citizens. In the embodied structures of inequality our bodies are differently experienced, and we have different options for changing that experience depending on our social location. Inequality in social relationships is fundamental to how bodies are constructed and experienced, and to how those constructions are challenged and resisted. (See ‘Social processes that transform our understanding of the body’.)

We use our bodies as the canvas on which we portray ourselves, our social standing and our moral worth. To have a ‘good’ body is to be ‘buffed’ in the

Social processes that transform our understanding of the body

Our sense of our bodies has been transformed by contemporary medical and cultural changes. *Medical technology* has now rendered problematic what was once thought to be the natural body. Indeed, the whole area of organ transplant has raised the problem of what constitutes the person, life and death. For example, medical professionals’ definitions of life and death are linked to their concerns for organ viability. These changes have allowed for the development of whole new realms of inequality, especially with regard to who has access to limited organs and surgical techniques, and in the treatment of the terminally ill (Elston 1997).

At the *cultural* level, other changes can be captured in the development of the idea of the body as a personal project. As Anthony Synott (1989:607) has put it, ‘you are what you look like’, and assumptions about an individual’s truthfulness and goodness are reflected in their bodily presentation.

gym, or on the jogging track, and the work involved in its maintenance is a claim to our moral worth. Our good bodies physically demonstrate our moral worth as social beings (Featherstone 1991). Equally, the absence of a good body, especially in women and in working-class men, is noted as a failure to 'keep control' of the embodied self. The problem with aged and disabled bodies is that they transgress the dominant concept of the good body. They highlight the problematic nature of what it is to be a social agent, the question of identity as a whole and of the characteristics of coherent social actors. In short our bodies 'are not only biological and practical but ... packed with connotations about what it means to be good, respectable, responsible' (Crawford, C. 1994:1347). The 'good body' is constructed against the 'bad' other – the overweight, the poorly dressed, the incorrectly presented, the disabled, and the old – and on the basis of our presentation of our bodily self we make claims, often not realising it, to membership of society, and for access to limited resources of prestige, occupation and income.

The micro-politics of bodily inequality

From the sociological perspective that we are developing, our bodies are the front line of the micro-politics of the social structure and of our experience of inequality. While we live in our bodies as biological realities with their need to be fed and watered, rested and cared for, they are also the social realities with which we experience social life. We have 'lived bodies' and we are bodies, and our knowledge of our embodied selves swings between the two categories. In fact the two levels of reality are completely interrelated, such that distinguishing between the natural body and the social body is a moot point. For example, Henley (1977) argues that the way we use our body directly corresponds to the social structures of inequality. Those in positions of dominance, based on class, gender and ethnicity, use their bodies in ways that reflect their powerful position. They control personal space during interactions, determining the distance between themselves and others. This is further illustrated by the fact that high-status people can touch lower-status people, but not the other way around. Erving Goffman (1967) has shown this well in his participant observation in hospitals. Higher-status individuals can touch, and make personal inquiries in a way that their subordinates cannot respond with. Even how high-status people use their eyes is linked to their dominant position, looking at the other person when they speak. Differentially, low-status persons look away when they speak to higher-status individuals. The powerful can move in on the personal space of a subordinate, but the subordinate cannot move into the space of the superior. High-status people are more relaxed in their bodily posture and

can present their bodies far more informally than their subordinates can. The powerful recline while seated, arrange their limbs asymmetrically, hold their hands loosely and relax the neck (Mehrabian 1972). Indeed, we even talk of high-status people 'walking tall', and regularly overestimate the height of powerful people (Schefflen 1973). By contrast lower socioeconomic groups are in fact shorter, and height plays a significant role in our evaluation of the social status of others. For example, short stature in childhood is a significant predictor of later unemployment, since it reflects poor socioeconomic background. Men with short stature and behavioural/developmental problems are more likely to experience unemployment in adult life, taking into account socioeconomic background, education and their parents' height (Montgomery et al. 1996). Another aspect of embodied inequality is that high-status individuals also control time, especially having control over the length of time that lower-status individuals should wait to see them. Higher-status individuals control conversations, especially turn taking, interrupting others or stopping the other from speaking altogether. The inequalities of bodily social interaction mirror the inequalities of the social structure.

The basis for a sociology of the body

The sociological enterprise of presenting an account of the body is based on a critique of the work of the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650). For Descartes the body was exactly like any other mechanical part of nature and was to be understood in the way that we would understand animal bodies; that is, without reference to their consciousness or soul. This philosophical position resonated with the development of the Industrial Revolution and mechanisation in Europe, and the body in western thought has come to be conceptualised in terms of the metaphor of a machine. The body is no longer thought of as the microcosm of the universe, as it was in the theological model of the universe of the Middle Ages, but rather reflects the mechanistic and industrial forms of production in the modern world (Rabinbach 1990).

Cartesianism (the noun derived from 'Descartes') can be briefly summarised in terms of three main characteristics. First, it has a dualistic image of the person, drawing a rigid distinction between consciousness and materiality, especially sharply distinguishing the mind and the body. This distinction has led to the formation of specialist academic disciplines. The consequence is that the body is the subject of the natural sciences and the mind the subject of the human sciences, so that it is difficult to recapture the totality of human experience. Second, it is reductionist, in that priority in explaining human action is given to the material, physical basis of existence. This behaviourist emphasis

means that it denies the salience of ‘mental’ events. Thus, problems of meaning and of subjective existence have been relegated to the unknowable or, at best, are only knowable in a limited and unscientific way. The focus of the social and natural sciences is on the empirically observable, and that about which causal laws, in a natural-science sense, can be generated. Sociology as a discipline is at least partially a fight to put meaning and interpretation back into the equation. Third, it is positivistic. In positivism, since the claim is that science and the social sciences should only be dealing with physical realities, the argument is that the methods of the natural sciences – of observation, quantification, experiment and the search for regularities and laws – are the only legitimate ones for the study of human beings. While Cartesianism was an important rebuttal of metaphysical and theological explanations of social life, rejecting explanations that could not be grounded in its definition of empirical reality, it has led to an approach that overlooks the impact of social structures on the consciousness of individuals.

In its dominant forms, in medicine and behaviourist psychology, human subjectivity was ruled out of court as a topic of exploration. Through Cartesianism the power of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century model of the natural sciences has created a sense of our self that neglects the interplay between our embodied selves and our socially located selves. Equally it has generated a picture of us as individuals, as free-floating atoms in social life, responsible for ourselves, but providing us as individuals with only the most limited information about the factors that produce, sustain, challenge and transform us. Central to the project of the sociology of the body is reconstructing an explanation of the experience of inequality that is embodied, that shows the self to be socially produced, and is the product of social relationships.

The origins of the sociology of the body: Classical social theory

For most of its intellectual life sociology took the body for granted, concerned that to focus on it would be to lead the discipline into a form of sociobiology. Sociobiology reduces explanations of social action to the behavioural dictates of the biologically taken-for-granted realm of how our society understands nature. The classical sociologists of the nineteenth century were concerned that sociology not be reduced to biology, for the good reason that ultimately this would exclude social explanations of action. For sociologists then and now, if sociology is to have an impact on the way social relationships, and particularly inequality, can be understood and then changed, the body must be seen as socially shaped and not as part of an unchangeable nature. In this the key contributions were from **Friedrich Engels** on the impact of industrialisation on the

body, **Max Weber** on military and factory discipline, and, in the Durkheimian tradition, the work of Marcel Mauss on styles of bodily comportment in different social situations. These in turn are dependent on a sociological analysis of our knowledge of nature, which can be shown to be shaped by the wider structures of society.

The critique of the idea of nature

In western society, the biological and medical knowledge of ourselves is held to be scientific in the sense of being unaffected by social and political variables. We also think of the states of our bodies – their healthiness, their size, their longevity, for example – as being a product of nature that exists independently of society, and as such as not contaminated by social variables.

However, sociologists have always been alert to the social shaping of scientific knowledge, and have been concerned to show that what looks like natural scientific knowledge is in fact profoundly social, in both its origins and its contents. **Karl Marx** was one of the first explicitly to formulate a critique of the way natural, biological knowledge is used in society to justify inequality. In his critique of Darwinian evolutionary biology, he argued that it is used to justify inequality, and to make inequality appear inevitable and ‘natural’. Writing to Engels in 1862, he commented:

It is remarkable how Darwin recognises among the beasts and plants his English society, with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, ‘inventions’ and the Malthusian struggle for existence. [Marx 1965:128]

Engels, nineteen years later, was to develop the argument more fully, pointing to the process whereby concepts of nature operate to legitimate forms of social organisation:

The whole Darwinist teaching of the struggle for existence is simply a transference from society to nature of Hobbes’ doctrine of ‘bellum omnium contra omnes’ [the war of all against all] and of the bourgeois doctrine of competition, together with Malthus’ theory of population. When this conjurer’s trick has been performed the same theories are transferred back again from organic nature to history and it is claimed that their validity as eternal laws of human society has been proved. The puerility of this procedure is so obvious that not a word need be said about it. [Marx 1965:302]

Marx and Engels are arguing that the way we conceptualise things as natural, and the scientific theories we use to explain nature, tell us more about our own social organisation than they do about an objectively existing nature. The

way we understand nature is a reflection of our own society. The relevance of their argument is easily shown. Class interests are still part of our knowledge of bodies, and can be found in explanations of the supposedly inevitable and natural inequality that the working class experiences. For example, in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, Reid and his colleagues claimed that working-class sperm had a simpler, more repetitive structure to its DNA than did middle-class sperm (Reid, Hagan and Coppleson 1979). They argued that this accounted for their claim that working-class people can only think using simple and repetitive thoughts, unlike the allegedly more complex thoughts of the middle classes (cited in Rose, Lewontin and Kamin 1984:231).

Despite the implicit critique of nature, it should immediately be acknowledged that European social theory in the nineteenth century reflected the patriarchal structure of society (and, as we show in chapters 8 and 9, was based on racist assumptions) and accepted male dominance as natural. The patriarchal and masculinist assumptions embedded in classical social theory were that 'bodies' were typically male bodies, associated with masculine attributes of coherence, mastery and dominance. To the extent that social actors were embodied, they were rational, white western males. It is only with recent feminism, as a part of sociological theory, that the argument has been developed that western concepts of the female body constructed it as passive, weak and inherently sick (Martin, E. 1989). Feminist approaches have led to a revitalisation of sociological concerns with bodies and the social forces that produce men and women and our knowledge of them. While the main concern of classical social theory was the unequal structuring of men's life by the organisation of industrial capitalist society, Engels, for example, also provided the basis of a Marxist-feminist analysis of unpaid domestic labour (to which we return in chapter 4) (Engels 1948) and documented the impact of work on women and children in his famous book *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 1974). (See 'Friedrich Engels and the impact of industrialisation on the body', page 24.)

Max Weber, the German sociologist, was also clear that the discipline of capitalist work organisation resulted in a regimen of authority over the worker's body, with psychological and physical consequences. He wrote briefly, but with great insight, about the parallels between military discipline and the body of the worker (Gerth and Mills 1948:253–64). Weber argued that the main source of all discipline is to be found in military organisation, with its requirement for the smothering of individual difference, and immediate compliance with orders, regardless of the personal qualities of the superior giving them. Thus discipline is the entirely rational organisation of large numbers to obey, independently of the disciplined persons' subjective thoughts or feelings. As Weber put it:

Friedrich Engels and the impact of industrialisation on the body

Engels demonstrated the social shaping of the body – what he called ‘the physiological results of the factory system’ – in his analysis of the impact of the structure of industrial work on the body of the workers. His central point is that it is the social organisation of society that determines the afflictions of our body. Engels reports on the distortion of the spinal column and legs of mill-hands; flattening of the feet; and among the best-fed and strongest of the workers, ‘we find, at least, pain in the back, hips, and legs, swollen joints, varicose veins, and large persistent ulcers in the thighs and calves’ (Engels 1974:170). In short, the development of the factory form of production completely transformed the human body, drawing on only a limited range of movements, enforcing passivity, in hot and humid or, alternatively, wet and cold conditions. Growth was stunted, and in Manchester the military recruiting officer ‘could hardly get men of five foot eight inches tall’ (Engels 1974:174). Engels also pointed to the different impact factory work had on women’s bodies, including deformities of the pelvis, the hip bones and the spinal column, while he noted that pregnant women worked up to the hour of delivery for fear of losing their jobs. And for those whose bodies were not deformed, there were accidents and maiming. While the body in itself was a biological reality, for Engels its shape, form and healthiness, and the length of life of the individual, were all socially produced – and the inequalities in terms of deformity and early death produced for those who had to sell their labour to factory owners were appalling (Engels 1974:168–78).

The content of discipline is nothing but the consistently rationalised, methodically trained and exact execution of a received order, in which all personal criticism is unconditionally suspended and the actor is unswervingly and exclusively set for carrying out the command. [Gerth and Mills 1948:253]

Weber was also alert to the idea that hierarchical forms of domination involve psychological subjugation as well as bodily compliance, and that the two interact with each other. Compliance destroys individuality, as conformity of action enforces collective behaviour. In the army ‘the masses are uniformly conditioned and trained for discipline in order that their optimum of physical and psychic power may be rationally calculated’ (Gerth and Mills 1948:254). Weber develops his argument to show that the second major drive towards discipline is the structure of the industrial economy. He specifically argues that it is industrial capitalism that produces the most far-reaching control over the worker’s body and psychological existence and enforces a rational, disciplined use of the body. As he puts it:

No special proof is necessary to show that military discipline is the ideal model for the modern capitalist factory ... organisational discipline in the factory is founded upon a completely rational basis. [Gerth and Mills 1948:261]

This process reaches its zenith in Frederick Taylor’s (1911) scientific management, and in time-and-motion studies in which the rational calculation of the

precise movements that the worker must make to execute a task are measured down to the smallest level (see Gilbreth and Gilbreth 1916). The subjugation of the worker is both psychological and physical, such that the organisation of factory labour itself induces unthinking compliance with no scope for individual resistance. Weber concludes of factory discipline, in words reminiscent of Engels:

The final consequences are drawn from the mechanization and discipline of the plant, and the psycho-physical apparatus of man is completely adjusted to the demands of the outer world, the tools, the machines – in short, to an individual ‘function’. The individual is shorn of his natural rhythm as determined by the structure of his organism; his psycho-physical apparatus is attuned to a new rhythm through a methodical specialisation of separately functioning muscles, and an optimal economy of forces is established corresponding to the conditions of work. [Gerth and Mills 1948:262]

For Marx, Engels and Weber the focus was on the impact of industrial capitalism on the body. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim gave rise to an alternative understanding of the body and social life. For these sociologists and anthropologists it was a more diffuse, though still stratified, society that shaped the body. For example, the anthropologist Marcel Mauss documented the ways in which different social practices shaped the body in different European cultures (Mauss 1973). Mauss was concerned to demonstrate that the use of the body can take a wide variety of forms and is not biologically dictated. He argued that our cultural and historical location – and not just class position – will determine how we carry out such various activities as running, marching, swimming and walking, and even how the limbs are positioned. In a parallel development, but with each unknown to the other, Norbert Elias demonstrated the evolution of the control of bodily functions in the Middle Ages. He demonstrates how the ‘natural’ functions of the body – urinating, defecating, spitting and blowing the nose, and even how people should sleep in the same bed – are transformed with the internal pacification of the developing European states. Elias argues that as European societies became more peaceful the body became more disciplined and managed, with the use of the body standing as a sign of correct social relationships (Elias 1978). What unites Mauss and Elias is the argument that the experience and use of the body are a product of socialisation and education. Mauss called the process the development of ‘techniques of the body’. Within any specific society these techniques would reflect not only fashion, but more importantly educational levels, and would be used to distinguish between prestige groups. The body, Mauss suggested, as did Elias, is not only socially produced, but it mirrors and reproduces the social structure by which it is produced. Furthermore, control of the body is central to a more

generalised social control that allows for the stable reproduction of social relationships. The control of the body, in short, was central to the maintenance of social order. Being educated and socialised into specific ways of deportment – Mauss calls it ‘habitus’ – works as ‘a retarding mechanism, a mechanism inhibiting disorderly movements’ (Mauss 1973:86), thereby contributing to the stability of social life.

The body as cultural mirror

Complementing, and in part flowing into, the sociological position that specific social structures produce our knowledge of ourselves, but allowing for resistance to the dominance of social processes, is the phenomenological tradition, which focuses on the body as a lived reality. Again this tradition is opposed to Cartesianism, arguing that we have both an image of our own body, and we are a body, that it is not given in a concrete way by nature. In German this distinction (which under the impact of Cartesian thought we have difficulty in making) is reflected in two words. *Leib* is our lived body and *Körper* is our physical body (Schilder 1950). As de Beauvoir (1953:69) has put it, ‘it is not the body-object described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject’ that is the concern of social analyses. Again there is an interaction here, between our ‘own’ perceived body, and its representation to us in the society that shapes us. Our understanding of our physical body is a social product, one into which we are socialised. In a similar way, but from an anthropological perspective, Douglas has argued:

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual interchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. [Douglas 1973:93]

Douglas analyses the body as a cultural text, with concepts of the body – in biology and medicine – reflecting the dominant concerns of the culture. The body is a ‘symbol of society’, in the sense that the society determines our understanding of it. Douglas reverses the nature–culture argument: we see in our ‘natural’ bodies what our culture determines for us as issues. (We make a similar point in the discussion of gender in relation to biological sex in chapter 7.) Take, for example, how in western culture we conceptualise cancer as a ‘war’ on the body by ‘invading’ enemy forces. Ludwick Fleck, much earlier than Douglas, was similarly concerned to show that the way in which the body is conceptualised, and disease and its relationship with the body, were not

given in nature but depended on the culture that produced knowledge of both (Fleck 1979). Indeed, he wanted to show how bacteriology, our understanding of the role of germs as the cause of disease, is itself a social product. He draws attention to two aspects of our knowledge of disease. The first is that our thinking about illness reflects its origins in nineteenth-century imperial expansion. Thus it is full of military metaphor, with invading micro-organisms doing 'battle' with the body. This underlying motif of medical knowledge is a direct reflection of its historical and cultural origins. The second aspect is the role of Christian thought in concepts of disease. Disease is seen as a 'demon', an external evil agent, that infects the person. This means that diseases are always moral categories and that they always carry social meaning (Sontag 1978). They are not morally neutral. Indeed, we could say that medical knowledge of diseases is normative judgements about what is good dressed up as scientific facts (Margolis 1976). Nowhere is this clearer than in reactions to AIDS as a 'gay plague', with its 'deserving' victims getting their just rewards for their 'unnatural' and 'wicked' acts, and the 'undeserving victims' of blood transfusions turned into media celebrities (Sontag 1989).

Similarly, Emily Martin has shown how medical understandings of menstruation are based upon an industrial model of women's bodies as 'systems'. In this model of women as 'systems' there is no scope for women as a group or as individuals to voice their own experiences and concerns about menstruation. They are effectively silenced and their claim to an experience of their reality ruled out of court (Martin, E. 1989). Our scientific and technological culture produces the knowledge we have of ourselves. The structure of society – in this case a patriarchal and industrial society – provides medicine with its metaphors that organise explanations of the body, and those metaphors carry the power relationships of the wider society. The strength of these sorts of analyses, and of Douglas's analysis, is that they provide a way of understanding a group or society through the ways it produces understandings of the bodies of its members. These approaches do not tell us about biology, but about the ways in which the society subdivides itself, marking out those with and without 'good' bodies. Thus the body is read as a text for the ways in which we can see how a society represents itself to its members. Bodies, rather than being given in nature, are a part of cultural discourse on which the social terrain is mapped.

Social structure, the body and inequality

Rather than see the body as part of the natural realm, we can construct accounts of it as the bearer of representations, a canvas on which society paints a picture of itself, which we then take to be a picture of nature. As Goffman

Tastes, class and inequality: Bourdieu's 'habitus'

According to Bourdieu, 'taste' – in all aspects of life, from comics to books, cartoons to art house, pulp fiction to literature, McDonald's to *haute cuisine* – is not a psychological characteristic of individuals but is determined by their social location. This has important implications for a sociology of 'distinctions', in which the 'taste' for art or music, for dance or sport alerts others to, and marks, our social position. A good example is provided by a study of different class orientations to sports and cigarettes. Lower-class children in an Australian study identified Rugby League and Australian Rules football as their favourite sports, while their middle-class counterparts favoured cricket. In terms of smoking, lower-class children had a far greater knowledge of brands, and identified Winfield as a popular cigarette, while their middle-class counterparts selected Benson and Hedges (Davis and McLean 1987). Winfield was marketed using Paul Hogan, the film actor who played Crocodile Dundee, and cultivated a brash 'ocker' image, while Aussie Rules is a high-impact, overtly aggressive physical sport. The appeal is to physical force, masculinity and rough manners. Cricket, on the other hand, is a languorous game, played by 'gentlemen' in white flannels, and Benson and Hedges, its packaging printed a solid gold colour, is marketed as an elite, refined cigarette. According to Bourdieu, these 'tastes' that an individual forms are then part of the **habitus** of their class position.

(1971) and Bourdieu (1984) have argued, the body is inscribed with social and cultural relationships. We consume goods to exchange symbols of our social location, and produce our body in the interests of exhibiting to others who we are. In Bourdieu's argument, both aspects of our identity are profoundly shaped by our class position, which determines what we can consume. Bodily dispositions are culturally provided and become stable ways of enacting ourselves in the social world (Bourdieu 1990).

The body then forms physical capital (Bourdieu 1984). The well-shaped and well-maintained body is used to show to others that we discipline and control ourselves, and that we are worthy – indeed, superior – members of society. Bourdieu's concern is to locate this process within the production and reproduction of class differences. He argues that consumption patterns are determined by economic abilities to consume, and that in turn what we consume marks our class position.

For Bourdieu, habitus (described in 'Taste, class and inequality', above) also includes settled class-specific ways of representing the body, and is a form of physical capital that enhances or limits access to scarce social resources and marks the individual's social location. Thus the middle and upper classes pursue exercise patterns that produce a lean, 'fit'-looking body, favouring jogging and swimming. The working class produces bodies in the gym, with physical bulk, muscularity and strength as their aims (Bauman, Owen and Rushworth 1990). Our habitus then acts as a settled way of interpreting and responding to the world, a set of lenses if you like, that focuses and defines reality, both economically and

physically. Alfred Schutz (1962) developed a similar conceptual argument, though without referring to class, when he argued that we operate with ‘recipes’ and ‘stocks of knowledge’ about reality, which shape our sense of social life.

Bourdieu argues that in contemporary society we show who we are in consuming taste, and that these symbolic forms of consumption mark out hierarchies of inequality. Those groups who have been most successful at developing their taste, and imposing their definition on other groups, are those with high ‘cultural capital’, those who know the range of tastes available across society. Because it takes time and money to learn the range of tastes available, and remembering that this process is an economically unproductive one – for example art- or wine-appreciation classes, or guided tours to Italy to view the paintings of the Renaissance, cost money and produce no discernible product in themselves – it will be the economically dominant class’s view of what is good taste that will prevail. For Bourdieu, then, inequality is economic, cultural and psychological, with poorer groups’ concepts of good taste gauged as second best. Patterns of inequality then impact not only in the material sense of poverty, but in the psychological sense of exclusion from the upper reaches of taste that would demonstrate cultural signs of membership of the dominant group.

It has been argued that in information-rich societies, those with the cultural knowledge of education can displace those who have access to economic capital alone (Gouldner 1979). Thus the access to the cultural capital of information technology about the Web and the Internet, according to Gouldner, will be a new divide in contemporary society, with those with the cultural capital to use the new technologies enormously privileged (see chapter 10). However, it is still the case that ultimately it takes economic capital to buy the computers and the upgrades, and to attend the classes on how to use them. Economic capital and cultural capital may not completely overlap, but they will always remain very closely aligned. Put another way, Bourdieu does not lose sight of the link between production and consumption. His embodied social agents are limited or enabled by their position in the economic system, which determines the range of commodities that they can consume. The material economic organisation shapes hierarchies of inequality around habitus and taste, and shapes the body as a marker of social standing.

Foucault: The enabling and the constrained body

For Bourdieu the body is the site of class inequalities. Michel Foucault (1926–1984), the French philosopher and historian, draws attention to another aspect of our experience of our body and the ways in which it is unequally constructed by the professional ‘helping’ occupations. Foucault argues that our

bodies are shaped through the disciplines of medicine, in the sense of the production of specialist knowledge of how to know ourselves (think of all the self-help books in the bookshop), as well as in the sense of the practices of how to act, to make them conform to the requirements of production and consumption in modern society. These knowledges and practices (which Foucault renders in the term *knowledge/power*) are achieved through the application of categories of deviance defined by professional groups of experts such as doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists.

Foucault, developing a sociohistorical analysis of the body in the West, argued that the 'given' substratum of the body as physical reality and of our consciousness of it were historically specific. Foucault points out that we believe

that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influences of history, but this too is false. The body is moulded by a great many regimes. [Foucault 1977:153]

The body for Foucault was finely inscribed with the power structures of the society in which it existed:

The body is directly involved in a political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. [Foucault 1977:25]

In capitalist society most agencies of social control were directed towards the production of docile bodies, tailored, literally in Taylorism, to the productive system of industrial society. Rather than an undifferentiated 'society', as in the work of Douglas or Mauss, or of a class-based society in Bourdieu, Foucault documents the rise of specific expert groups whose task it is to define the body. It is not a chance happening that we view our bodies as we do; rather it is one that occurs in specific forms of power/knowledge. Discussing the body and power, Foucault reflected:

When I think of the mechanics of power, I think of its capillary form of existence, of the extent to which power seeps into the very grain of the individuals, reaches right into their bodies, permeates their gestures, their posture, what they say, how they learn to live and work with people. [cited in Martin, E. 1989:6]

In this Foucault reflects Weber's concerns with the production of rationalised, disciplined bodies, suited for the tasks of industrial capitalism – of docile, productive bodies at the height of industrial capitalism with its disciplines of the factory, the prison, the asylum and the hospital. With political and economic changes since Foucault's death – especially the decline of industrial production in western societies – the requirement is that we now possess autonomous bodies that we self-regulate and control.

There is, then, a paradox at the heart of Foucault's argument: precisely because our bodies are shaped – because they are at the centre of fields of power – we can reject or modify that process. These two positions can be summarised as 'the difference between "having a body" (the body as constraint) and "being a body" (the body as capacity)' (Turner, B. 1992:95).

Nowhere is this clearer than in the ways in which we manage our **gender** identities. Feminism, with its focus on the medicalisation of women and their reproductive system (see chapter 4), has alerted us to the ways in which the body is socially shaped (Bartsky 1988). In particular it has directed attention to the way in which women's bodies are constructed as unequal, different and sicker than men's bodies. For example, femininity is a synonym for weakness, and women's jobs are 'caring' jobs at best and bad jobs at worst. Gender differentiation is a form of subordination and domination. The division of labour between the genders is a powerful one, shaping the production and experience of inequality (see chapter 9). However, while patriarchal images of masculinity and femininity are overarching, claiming to represent natural differences between men and women, we also have to perform gender as individuals within the categories of masculine and feminine (Butler 1993), and it is this 'performativity' – or flexibility – that allows us scope as individuals to depart from the dominant discourse. Thus transsexualism, transvestism, homosexuality and bisexuality are all options of resistance to patriarchy, and represent different and oppositional ways of 'doing' gender. (We discuss the significance of transsexualism for an understanding of gender and self-identity at length in chapter 7.) Take, for example, the adoption by women bodybuilders of the male aesthetics of body shapes, which demonstrates (to the women in an empowering sense, and the men in a threatening sense) that the body can be moulded independently of biological understandings of its limits (Mansfield and McGinn 1993). The utility of taking on aspects of the dominant discourse is further illustrated by Waterhouse (1993) in a study of the adoption of male dress by lesbians in the nineteenth century. While potentially entrapping the women inside the masculinist discourse of viewing potential sexual partners as objects, cross-dressing simultaneously provided the only avenue for lesbian women to see each other. Alternatively the dominant discourse of female subjugation to male desire can be held at bay, as S. Edwards (1993) shows in her study of prostitutes, not by taking on aspects of the dominant male discourse (body shape or dress), but by withholding access to parts of the body associated with acts and discourses of intimacy – most notably kissing the mouth. In all of these areas the bodily experience of inequality – enabled and constrained – as a product of class, gender or professional classification is central. Society – whether construed as patriarchal, class-based or ethnically structured – is not an overwhelming set of values that is passively inscribed on our bodies, but,

paradoxically and simultaneously, provides scope for resistance and performance in our presentation of self.

The poststructuralist/postmodern body

It can be argued that structuralist social theories – those theories that focused on the overarching structures of class, gender and ethnicity – reduced the individual, and the body, to the social forces that produced and shaped them. **Poststructuralism** emphasises that individuals' subjectivities, individuals' knowledges of the self, could be made in many different ways. The work of Michel Foucault has been very important in this debate, because paradoxically he has contributed clear evidence for both sides of the argument. He has shown, in a structuralist way as we have seen above, how bodies are socially determined. But he has also argued for the enabling experience of being part of a web of power relations around which definitions of the body are contested. Our bodily experience is not just a passive one in which a dominant set of societal images are passively experienced, as Bourdieu's work tends to suggest. Rather, we actively participate in this shaping, as suggested by Foucault in the context of power relationships (Foucault 1980).

In a poststructuralist mode, Foucault argued that conscious individuals were enabled by the workings of the social system to emancipate themselves. There was, he argued, no fundamental human self, only the sense of self that we live with – and because this could clearly be shown to be very specific in cultural and historical senses, we could equally 'make' ourselves by challenging those with the power to define us. The theme that we can make ourselves has become an influential one in contemporary social theory. This aspect of choice is developed in chapter 7, where the poststructuralist/**postmodern** approach is scrutinised in relation to the limits of choice for individuals shaping their gender identity.

The strength of the insights of poststructuralism – that we are conscious of ourselves, and have the scope to make ourselves – is a powerful one that reflects the power of the ideology of individualism in modern societies. It is also linked to social changes in society, in which, it is argued, consumption has become more important as a source of our identity than our place in the productive sector of the economy. The argument is that with the decline of the industrial sector in western economies, and associated with this the centrality of hierarchically organised and administered factories and bureaucracies, we can no longer derive our sense of self-identity from our work. Rather than having a fixed occupation for life, settling as adults into one location, we are now faced with constant downsizing and restructuring and need to be geographi-

cally mobile to pursue transient occupations. In this new set of social relations, people cannot communicate who they are through a biography fixed by their participation in the economy or sense of community (Sennett, 1998; see also chapter 10, this volume).

Thus we are poststructural in the sense of being outside the structures of work, and some have argued outside the structures of stable gender identities (see chapter 7). Because the nuclear family, with its gender roles and the rigid separation between the public world of work and the private world of the family, no longer holds because of changes in the economy, so too has the necessity for maintaining rigid boundaries between men and women weakened. Thus we have seen the development of new forms of 'identity politics' around the sexuality of being gay, or lesbian, with Giddens (1992a:179) arguing that 'normal sexuality is simply one type of lifestyle choice among others', with 'normal' presumably referring to heterosexual conduct. New social movements have developed, claiming equal rights to parenting for homosexual and heterosexual couples, with the technologies of artificial insemination and test-tube babies making all these changed gender relationships possible.

It is not surprising then that the structural changes to work, the family and gender characteristics of the modern society of the period between the 1960s and today have led to some forceful re-examinations of the existence of structured inequality and of the increased options for actions open to individuals.

The decline of industry and the rise of consumption

Over the past four decades there have been remarkable changes in the patterns of employment in Australia, captured in the idea of the development of the 'post-industrial society'. The proportion of those working in the industrial sector has declined from 46 per cent to 28 per cent, while that of those working in the service sector has increased from 54 per cent to 72 per cent (ABS 1997). At the same time there has been a feminisation of the workforce, an increase in part-time employment and a blurring of the boundaries between work conducted in a 'workplace' and that conducted in the home. In combination, these structural changes have led to the claim that we now live in a postmodern world, freed of the old structures of industrial capitalism and the bourgeois nuclear family that dominated twentieth-century Australia.

For some theorists the discovery of the body, linked to these weakened social structures, has led to the argument that we construct our bodies as we see fit. Anthony Giddens, for example, emphasises the openness of the body, and of individuals to shape it: 'We have become responsible for the design of our own bodies' (Giddens 1991:102). For Jean Baudrillard there has been a proliferation

of cultural signs, the loss of fixed and stable objects for them to refer to and, at the personal level, the development, or at least the ability to develop, multiple, changing identities (Baudrillard 1989). If for Bourdieu we consume signs of each other's social standing as determined by class location, for Baudrillard we float free, with multiple identities and changing senses of self. In this consumption is central, not for survival in the sense that we consume for food, comfort, warmth and housing, or for health, but in that we consume only to exchange signs of who we are, or in his terminology to 'signify' who we are. The commodity consumed may have no actual utility, in the sense of fulfilling any concrete objective for which it was designed. Thus we wear Nike joggers, not because we jog in them, but because they signify a claim to healthiness, status and prestige. Baudrillard calls this the 'floating signifier effect' (Baudrillard 1989). Perhaps an even better example is the famous black-and-white Benetton advertisements, in which no reference was made to Benetton being a clothing manufacturer. Only the 'sign' of Benetton existed, 'floating freely'. It signified, but did not refer to clothing, conferring on those who consumed Benetton products their participation in a world of signs and images that excluded those who did not know them. Who we claim to be is established by our participation in the consumption of these signifiers. Our bodily materiality is only the exchange of symbols without a basis in any sort of reality. We live in what Eco has called 'hyperreality', in which the material basis of life has disappeared (Eco 1986).

Similarly, Bauman (1992) has argued that both our sociological knowledge and the world that we live in are uncertain, ambivalent, deregulated and insecure. The stable basis of our identity has gone, as have the certainties of social-science knowledge. At the core of these changes, according to Bauman (1998), is a transformation from a culture of production, in which hard work, thrift and self-discipline held sway, to a world of hedonistic indulgence. Rather than hard work resulting in savings and social prestige, we are rewarded with 'free sex', designer drugs and 'life in the fast lane'.

At the same time, this approach takes away from sociology one of its key insights as a discipline: that we are shaped by the historical and cultural social forces in which we live. The fact that we are aware that we are socially shaped – by economic, political and gendered social relationships – does not give us a brief to escape these processes. To be forewarned is not to be forearmed. Our position in society's power structures still determines the ways we think of and know ourselves. Sociologically, the point, of course, is that some appearances to the contrary, we still do live in a materially structured social world in which access to economic resources determines our ability to exchange 'free floating signifiers' with each other. For example, the voluntaristic edge to Giddens's claim has to be balanced by the fact that making a project out of your body – whether from plastic surgery through to the gym, or just walking – is linked to

patterns of inequality in society. We are not all free to make our bodies as we would like. It is also the case that we do not make our bodies as we see fit, but to conform to pre-given cultural and social patterns of beauty, fitness and adequacy. We do it to exchange social symbols of our successful membership of a group, to increase our chances of access to powerful or prestigious sectors of social life. Bryan Turner (1984), for example, has demonstrated how the body is profoundly produced by the organisation of society. At the broadest level, societies need their bodies to be reproduced in a stable way, restrained in space, regulated over time and physically represented to conform to social dictates of normality. These are not individual initiatives, though it is on individual bodies that these processes are worked out, and it is by individuals that they are carried out. As we will see, these structural constraints on our capacity to make our bodies are not confined to the body. They impinge on other areas such as gender, cultural identity and life chances.

Post-industrial society and new forms of inequality

The development of the post-industrial society – the outcome of new forms of technology and globalisation – has brought new patterns of inequality in its train, which belie the optimistic analyses of the theorists discussed above (see chapter 10). While there has been a feminisation of the workforce, women are concentrated in the service sector and making less money than men, migrant non-English-speaking males have experienced reduced employment, the growth in jobs has been predominantly in part-time rather than full-time positions, and there has been an increase in the numbers of long-term unemployed. Thus the post-industrial society is one that has its own cleavages built into it: between men's work and women's work; between full-time work and part-time work; and between those who are underemployed (that is, would do more work if they could get it) and those who are overemployed (that is, in full-time jobs but working more than forty-five hours a week) (Norris and Wooden 1996). These changes can be captured in an autobiographical 'snapshot' of the changes in male labour-market composition in just under the past twenty years (AIHW 1999a:44), as shown in 'Changes in the Australian labour market' (page 36).

Given these changes, surveys of Australian workers have found no evidence that they have been freed from old industrial structures (see chapter 10). Rather, what they have experienced is an increased sense of insecurity and uncertainty about work. Asked if they felt 'very secure' or 'fairly secure' about their job, 73 per cent of Australian workers in 1989–90 responded in the affirmative, but by 1996–97 only 56 per cent did so (Kelley, Evans and Dawkins 1998). While workers no longer suffer the bodily degradation of factory life

Changes in the Australian labour market: Characteristics of a worker, 1980 and 1998

- In 1980 there was a 63 per cent likelihood that the worker would be male.
- In 1980 he had a 79 per cent likelihood of working full-time.
- In 1980 he had only an 8 per cent likelihood of working part-time.
- By 1998 there was a 57 per cent chance that the worker was male.
- By 1998 his chance of working full-time had decreased to 68 per cent.
- By 1998 his chance of working part-time had increased to 26 per cent.

captured by Engels and Weber, it is clear that new forms of inequality affect bodies at work. Further, as we shall see in the next chapter, bodily ailments and death are still unequally structured in the workplace and in the interactions of economic resources, social position, gender and ethnicity.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to challenge the taken-for-granted view of the body as a part of nature that exists independently of social life. At the social-psychological level it has been well-demonstrated that the powerful use their body in very different ways to those without power. Our bodies are not just biological but carry the markers of our social position and act to mark out patterns of social inequality. Fundamental to this argument is the understanding that what we take to be nature, or natural, is in fact socially produced. Marx, Engels and Weber, writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, demonstrated how the body was shaped and disabled by the rigours of industrial capitalism, which involved disciplining the body for factory labour and, at the psychological level, of inducing obedience and compliance in the worker. Anthropologists such as Douglas have developed analyses of the body as a cultural mirror, showing how patterns of hierarchy and inequality are drawn onto it. Developing a similar analysis, Bourdieu argues that our bodies are the habitus in which we live out our social life in a class-based society. Rather than being natural, they are socially marked and produced to show where we fit in the social hierarchy, reflecting inequalities in access to socially valued 'tastes'. With changes in industrial societies – particularly the decline of industry – theorists have argued that many of the constraints of capitalism have been removed, and social roles in the family relaxed. Giddens and Baubdrillard, for example, argue that we are free to construct our biographies, our bodies and our genders as we wish. Against this position, we argued that these changes have not freed people from restraints, but rather have brought their

own inequalities with them. While more women have joined the workforce, it is in more part-time positions and with less pay. The changing patterns of employment have meant an increase in non-career occupations in the service sector, and men have experienced a decline in employment. When Australian workers were surveyed on these issues, they did not report that they felt freer, or more empowered. Rather they felt at risk and had no certainty for their future. We may have new patterns of industry, and of social roles, but we have not left the sources of inequality behind, and the changes are bringing new ones in their train.

This chapter has reviewed changing understandings of how the ‘natural’ body and the ‘social’ body have been conceptualised over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As social life has changed, so too has the way we think about our body. With industrialisation, bodies were thought of and treated as mechanical objects. With changes at the level of technology, bodies are thought of and treated as producers of goods adapted to being producers of services and of more intangible products such as information. However, despite the claims of postmodernists, old forms of inequality persist and new forms of inequality have developed and are developing.

Key terms and concepts

- Nature
- Body
- Cartesianism
- Friedrich Engels
- Max Weber
- Karl Marx
- The enabling body
- The constrained body
- Habitus
- Gender
- Poststructuralism
- Postmodernism

Study questions

- 1 Ours is a scientific culture that presents the body as a natural fact. In what ways have sociologists challenged this claim?
- 2 Why do sociologists argue so strongly against the idea that nature is somehow an objectively existing reality?
- 3 In what ways can the body be seen as the outcome of patterns of inequality in society?
- 4 Has transformation in society freed us up to be and choose the body we want?
- 5 The body is the mirror on which patterns of inequality are inscribed. Discuss.
- 6 How does our position in the economic structure determine what we will and will not like?

Further reading

Bauman, Z. 1998. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Argues that patterns of consumption are the basis of new forms of inequality in contemporary capitalist societies.

Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.

Butler argues that while gender identity is provided to us by our position in the class structure, the fact that we have to perform it means there can be scope for individual initiative in enacting gender.

Engels, F. 1974. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

The classic description of the impact of capitalist industrialisation on the working class in England. It is still a powerful and haunting book, and the best ethnography of urban life in the nineteenth century.

Featherstone, M., M. Hepworth and B.S. Turner (eds). 1991. *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. London: Sage.

A good collection of essays laying out the sociological approaches to understanding the body.

Turner, B.S. 1996. *The Body and Society*. 2nd edn. London: Sage.

A highly influential account of the social production and shaping of the body.

3 Sick Bodies and Inequality: Class, Mortality and Morbidity

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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We experience sickness and disease as individuals and tend to think of it as bad luck, a biological inevitability or a product of our own lifestyles (for an overview of the sociology of health, see White, K. 1991, 2001). In this chapter we demonstrate that sickness and disease are far from random, but are systematically generated in terms of the social distribution of the risk of disease and of the patterns of sickness and disease. The chapter demonstrates the links between the individual and the social context in which he or she lives. We are concerned most with advancing the argument that, although an individual's health is played out as a subjective experience of their own body, the experience itself is a product of social inequalities that inscribe disease on the body. We argue that **class** is still a useful conceptual device to account for the individual experience of health and sickness. As we saw in the previous chapter, about the body, new social currents are opening up alternative sources of action, and of inequality, and as we shall see in the chapter on women's bodies, there are forces at work other than class in

shaping inequality. Despite this, it is still the case that class helps us understand patterns of disease, especially those produced through **work**. It has been argued by some contemporary social theorists that the experience of inequality and disease has been transformed with the decline of class and by the development of strong communities. We argue that although membership of strong communities has a role to play in maintaining good health, this approach claims too much. Strong communities also have access to economic and political resources that enable them to be strong. So this is one area of social life where the class basis of inequality as a determinant of life chances has not changed. The appearance of a class-based society may have been transformed, but not the individual experience of class-produced illness and death.

The data on class and health inequality is now overwhelming researchers. In 1996 there were 200 articles a month appearing in the journal literature worldwide using **socioeconomic status**, social class, income or poverty in their titles related to health (Kaplan 1997). Major reviews of the evidence are to be found in journals (Fein 1995; Feinstein 1993; Turrell 1995; Turrell et al. 1999) and edited collections (Blane 1996; Evans et al. 1996; Wilkinson and Marmot 1998). The challenge is to make sense of these patterns, which show links between inequality and disease.

The report *Australia's Health 2000*, for example, claims that although the association between socioeconomic disadvantage and disease is well-established in Australian and overseas research, and that the link between increasing socioeconomic disadvantage and increasing morbidity and mortality well-demonstrated, 'the reason for the relationship is not clear' (AIHW 2000a:219). Indeed the section of the report on the socioeconomically disadvantaged and disease occupies only three pages out of the report's 477. In this chapter we review some of the major explanations of this link. *Australia's Health 2000* suggests environmental factors, genetic factors, attitudes and beliefs, lifestyle, and behavioural and biomedical factors. Although we address these explanations, we are concerned to place them in a sociological framework, which shows how they work their way out as a unified set of inequalities, while at the same time they are experienced by the individual as largely personal and private affairs of their own health.

We also need quickly to dispose of two of the explanations that have a particularly powerful hold on the general imagination, especially as represented in newspaper stories and the fictional portrayal by the medical docudramas on television. These are, first, that disease is caused by **genetic** factors and, second, that modern medicine has been the major cause of success in the treatment and prevention of disease. The critique of these arguments is well-worked in the sociological literature, and, for that reason, will be dealt with quickly before we examine **lifestyle** factors, which have a strong hold on both the public and the epidemiologists who try to identify them as the cause of disease.

Social and political functions of genetic explanations

The appeal of genetic explanations is that they deflect attention from social explanations of disease. In the genetic explanation, people become diseased and die because of their genes and not because of the way society is organised. The political implication of genetic explanations is that they minimise the responsibility of governments to undertake interventions to protect individuals from the consequences of social organisation. Genetic explanations are also used to justify inequality as natural and inevitable. Wertz (1992) has called this the 'geneticising of society', in which a fatalism about health, disease and life chances is fostered. The focus on genes breaks any link that sociologists may try to make between individuals' health and illness and the society they live in.

Genetic explanations

Genetic explanations of disease reduce the socially produced and shaped experience of disease to the lowest common denominator of the human body, its genetic structure. In doing this they divert attention from the social, political and economic environment that produces the circumstances of disease. They are reductionist in that they explain complex wholes (the social shaping of death and disease) by the working of the parts (individuals, who in turn are explained by the workings of their parts). The complex processes of human society are reduced first to individuals, then to their genes. From this it is concluded that an understanding of the workings of the smallest part – the gene – will provide an explanation of the workings of the whole (see 'Social and political functions of genetic explanations', above).

From a sociological perspective, events must be explained by reference to social factors, not individual ones. In this sense it is far more coherent to talk of a genetic vulnerability to environmental risks that predisposes individuals to disease. The risks are socially, politically and economically 'shaped', not genetically 'produced'. The former provide the ground for the latter. For example, diseases which were thought to have a strong genetic component, such as cardiovascular disease, disappear when the socioenvironmental factors that allow them to develop disappear (White, K. 2002b).

The role of modern medicine

It is common in modern western societies to assume that current standards of health are the product of breakthroughs in medical science since the nineteenth century, when the pioneers of medicine made great advances, saving us from infectious disease. Certainly this continues to be the view of medicine into which we are socialised at school and by television programs, where heroic

doctors, using the latest scientific technology and backed up by humanitarian concern for their patients, do wonders. However, there is little empirical evidence to support this view, and a great deal to support the view that the development of modern medicine was largely irrelevant to the development of healthy populations (White, K. 1999).

Studies of the historical patterns of disease show that every major disease of the nineteenth century was brought under control, not through scientific medicine – of drugs, new technologies or even the development of hospitals – but through sanitary reform of the city, the control of the production of foodstuffs, and control of the impact of industrialisation on the environment (McKeown 1965, 1979). Based on his research, McKeown concluded that medicine contributed less than 1 per cent to the decline in mortality from infectious diseases in the nineteenth century. What improved people's health standards, as Szreter (1988) has pointed out, was a political struggle in which organised workers and sanitary reformers fought against the owners of industry to put the health and safety of workers ahead of profit (see the discussion of the Factory Acts of the late nineteenth century in chapter 9, this volume; also White, K. 1999, 2001).

If this was true for the development of modern medicine, is it still the case? McKinlay and McKinlay (1977) examined the impact of medical intervention on the three leading killers of the twentieth century: coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer. They concluded that despite the immense sums of money invested in the prevention and treatment of these conditions, medicine has contributed to only a 3.5 per cent decline in mortality. Yet another way of evaluating the contribution of medical practice to health is provided by Bunker (1994), who estimated that medical practice has extended life by five years. Given that the life span of the individual has increased by twenty-five years since the turn of the century, this means that medicine has made, at most, a 20 per cent contribution to our increased standard of health and longevity. As *Australia's Health 2000* (AIHW 2000a:359) acknowledges:

the decline in mortality over the twentieth century in Australia has been dramatic. Growth in income, increased educational levels and consequent improvements in food intake, water quality, and sanitation have accounted for much of the decline.

Lifestyle, social capital and work

The most important current explanation of the link between the individual and disease is the 'lifestyle' explanation, that individuals choose (and are blamed for choosing) risky behaviours that have an adverse impact on their health. We

show that there is little evidence for this argument, arguing instead that much of the association between lifestyle and disease is not supported in the literature. We develop the argument that the choices individuals make are largely choices within tight constraints, and that their individual actions correspond with their social position.

We also examine the impact of communities and their impact on the health of individuals. This, the '**social capital**' explanation, suggests that strong active communities protect their individuals from disease. While it may be the case, and there is evidence to support the broad contours of this argument, we suggest that strong healthy communities also have access to economic and political resources – and that it is possession of these resources that explains their better health rates. Take, as a poignant example, Australian children from low socio-economic backgrounds, who are placed at a far higher risk of pedestrian accidents because without access to cars they have to cross more roads. Children from families without a car crossed an average of 5.34 streets a day, compared with 2.90 streets for children from families with a car, while children from two-car families crossed only 1.97 streets (Roberts, Norton and Taua 1996).

The impact of inequalities of work and income is also much better candidates for explaining the way in which disease levels reflect wider social inequalities, and we review this evidence. The overall best candidate for explaining inequality of health is the level of material deprivation that individuals and communities find themselves in, as Australian data illustrates.

Lifestyle

Neither genetic explanations of the cause of disease, nor medical developments preventing disease are adequate accounts of the processes linking the individual, the society they live in and their health. What then of lifestyle factors? Even if there are clear indications that some lifestyle factors cause stroke – as is suggested for cigarettes, lack of exercise and obesity (Shinton 1997) – we still need to go beyond explanations that focus on the lifestyle factors.

The most famous studies of the limited role of lifestyle factors and of the impact of inequality on health are the Whitehall Studies conducted by Michael Marmot (Marmot et al. 1978; Marmot et al. 1991; Marmot 1998). Marmot established the existence of what is known as the '**social gradient of disease**', in which fine grades of inequality between different levels of social hierarchy are indicated by worsening levels of disease as you move down the hierarchy. Those at the top of the British civil service have better health than those in the second level, and they in turn have better health than those in the third, and so on down. He found that the health differences among the male white-collar

office workers he studied between the top and bottom of the hierarchy are as bad as the health differences between class 1 individuals and class 5 individuals in the wider society. Class 1 are those in professional and managerial positions, while those in class 5 are unskilled labourers. Thus Marmot established that hierarchical inequality is reflected in disease rates, whether the hierarchy is across the British civil service or in the better-known hierarchy across the occupational scale. More importantly for sociological explanations of disease, Marmot found that lifestyle factors – exercise, smoking, blood pressure and weight – account for less than one-third of the differences in disease rates between those at the top and those at the bottom of the hierarchy. He found in the case of coronary heart disease (which is widely accepted to have a lifestyle component in the biomedical literature) that lifestyles did not explain the fourfold differences in heart attacks between those at the top of the civil service and those at the bottom. Individual risk factors accounted for, at most, 40 per cent of the difference. Put another way, there was no lifestyle explanation for 60 per cent of heart attacks. Thus it is clear, Marmot argued, that it is the existence of a social gradient rather than lifestyle that explains the differences in heart-attack rates.

Lifestyle actions such as smoking are often assumed to be purely individual activities. However, our lifestyles are shaped by the social structures around us. Take, for example, the way smoking is linked to wider social variables. The biggest associations of smoking behaviour are neighbourhood deprivation. Even better-off people, with higher education levels than those around them, living in poor areas, are more likely to smoke than other well-off people (Siahpush and Borland 2001; Kleinschmidt, Hills and Elliot 1995). Furthermore, even were smoking a purely individual choice, lung-cancer trends are not wholly associated with smoking levels. Factors other than just smoking, especially interactions with industrial pollution, are implicated (Lee 1998). In a study of Port Adelaide, examining industry, air quality, cigarette smoking and respiratory illness, the researchers concluded in part of their study that respiratory disorders ‘in males appears to be linked to the area with highest industry independently of smoking’ (Pilotto, Smith and Nitschke et al. 1999). As Wilkinson (1996:65) has put it: ‘class differences in death rates ... cannot be seen simply as a failure to heed the dos and don’ts of healthy behaviour’.

The explanation of heart disease as a consequence of lifestyle has also been unsuccessful, which is particularly important in the critique of the lifestyle explanation, for it is the condition in which behavioural factors were thought to be the significant contributors. The province of Gerona in Spain has some high predictors for cardiovascular diseases at the individual level: but the high lipids and cholesterol levels from dietary factors, high smoking levels, and high levels of hypertension are not indicative of cardiovascular disease levels (Masia 1998). Other cultural factors – as yet undetermined – intervene to protect the

population from their lifestyle activities. Another example of the limitations of a purely lifestyle approach is provided by the way the impact of drugs is mediated by culture. In Russia, where alcohol consumption takes the form of binge drinking, it has been found that the protective effects of alcohol consumption found with moderate consumption in the West are not replicated. Rather, there is a pattern of death associated with alcohol poisoning, accidents, violent deaths and cardiovascular disease on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays. Binge-drinking patterns significantly affect the impact of alcohol. Thus culturally significant patterns of behaviour mediate the biological impact of substances (Chanet et al. 1998). Australian studies have also shown that alcohol consumption is shaped by sociodemographic factors, such as rural location, being an unemployed man or a man in a blue-collar occupation, each of which leads to higher levels of consumption and associated sickness and disease (Jonas, Dietze and Rumbold 1999). As Smith and colleagues put it, the characteristics of individuals and the areas that they live in have to be examined, because both have a role to play. Nevertheless, the social environment has to be given priority, for they found that death from all causes and cardiovascular-disease mortality rates were both negatively influenced by area-based deprivation or social class (Smith et al. 1998b).

Of all the diseases to which either a genetic or a lifestyle explanation has been applied, cancer stands out. This is despite the fact that socioenvironmental causes are now well-established. Take, for example, a British study of the period between 1953 and 1980, of the 22,458 children dead of cancer or leukemia between the ages of 0 and 15. Relatively excess rates of leukemia and cancer were found in those areas where heavy industry was concentrated. This included: (1) oil refineries, oil-storage plants, rail-side oil-distribution centres, and bitumen manufacturers; (2) motor-car factory; (3) major users of petroleum products – paint and solvent manufacturers, through to plastic and detergent manufacturers; (4) steelworks, power stations, galvanisers and cement-makers, and foundries; and (5) airfields, motorways and harbours. Moving away had a beneficial effect on the children's health (Knox and Gilman 1997). In a study of 300,000 people, Sloggett and Joshi (1998) found a clear and significant patterning of social deprivation and poor life events, including mortality and self-reported long-term illness. It is our social environment and not our individual actions that need to be explored to understand patterns of disease.

Communities and social capital

The governments of the United States, Britain and Australia, since the 1980s, have been involved in a set of economic and political policies generically

called neo-liberalism (see chapter 10). In these policies the attempt is made to reduce the size of the state, and to devolve to the **community** services once provided by the state. In the health area the growth of the 'home hospital', when patients are discharged sooner from hospital to be nursed at home and to save costs, is a particular example. The costs and the responsibility are pushed back down the system, in this case usually onto women in the home (Donath 2001; see also chapter 4, this volume). Another example is the increasing demands made of parents with disabled children that they take more responsibility for their care, as well as the deinstitutionalisation policies for the mentally ill, some of whom are now in dosshouses, or sleeping in the streets. Yet another current example is that of the care of demented partners or parents by their spouses and children (Opie 1991, 1992). Many of these initiatives come cloaked in rhetoric of 'respect' for the patient, inmate or disabled. But it must be kept in mind that these developments represent a disengagement of the state from responsibilities that were taken for granted under the welfare state.

The welfare system that serviced the industrial working class, the nuclear family and suburban life with the provision of health, welfare, education and community resources, known generically as the social wage, has been substantially modified. The material redistribution of resources that went with the social wage has been replaced by idealist rhetoric of self-help and community, encapsulated in the literature as 'social capital'. The decline of industrialised production, with the moving of whitegoods factories and car plants offshore to South-East Asia, has destroyed the communal identity of labour based on industry and urban location. Increasing levels of sickness with this decline – for the material reasons that there has been a real decline in wages since 1980 and an increase in the social circumstances of poverty – of overcrowding, poor diet and lack of access to the necessities of a healthy life – have meant a resurgence in the infectious diseases characteristic of the nineteenth century. Rather than people getting sick and dying of diseases of affluence, as is commonly suggested in the media, they are suffering from diseases of poverty (Kuh et al. 1997; Whitehead 1987).

Because of the decline of the community and the shrinking role of the state in the welfare sector, current policy emphasis is on 'active citizenship', in which individuals take more responsibility for themselves and, more commonly, women in the 'informal', 'domestic' sector take on the care of the disabled, the sick, the elderly and the demented. It is no surprise that there has been a growing interest in the theory of social capital (Lomas 1998), which many neo-liberal policy planners now see as a solution to the decline of the welfare system. Individuals should strive to build up social capital by their own endeavours, thereby increasing their social networks and hence their health. To the extent that they fail to do this, it is because of their own inability to generate social cap-

ital. Thus at the turn of the twenty-first century we have seen the return of one of the hallmarks of the turn of the nineteenth century: **blame the victim**.

The structures and the types of relationships that we are involved in have an impact on our health, while our 'individual' biology or lifestyle habits do not. Indeed, this has been well-known in sociology ever since Durkheim's famous study of mental health and suicide rates. Durkheim argued that there was an ideal balance between social integration and social dependence, which resulted in a low rate of suicide. He argued that social groups that gave their members a sense of identity and purpose, and that allowed them freedom to pursue their goals – that is, gave them a sense of autonomy – had lower suicide rates. Alternatively, too little social support, or social networks that allowed too little independence, led to higher suicide rates. Both under-integration and over-integration are unhealthy (Durkheim 1966).

Social-capital theorists have recently recaptured Durkheim's insights, though largely without acknowledgement. Communities that have high rates of participation in civic affairs can be shown to have high levels of health. Communities in which individuals have been involved in voluntary groups, have strong work or union associations, have clear senses of neighbourhood identity, and have an active sense of participation are also healthy communities. At the same time, it must be noted that this rapidly leads to a blame the 'poor community' approach, in which it is asserted that it is their fault for not developing strong senses of belonging or of social capital (see chapter 5). Furthermore, the focus on social capital can easily lead to researchers overlooking the impact of specific community conditions in which clear socioeconomic factors that the community has no control over – factory closures or regional economic depression – are clear factors in breaking the community and in causing poor health. While individual perceptions and group formation do have a role to play, the material basis of their existence cannot be overlooked. Indeed the concept of social capital has an enormous appeal to right-wing policy-makers, who argue that health is the responsibility of specific communities, and not a consequence of economic restructuring or regional decline.

It is no coincidence that 'healthy communities' with strong social capital also have access to economic capital and political resources. There is clear evidence of material factors – of income level and occupation – rather than cultural factors, in the cause of mortality in an examination of the predictive value of class position against educational level as variables. Occupation is most often used in the United Kingdom, whereas education level is most used in the United States, with the assumption that it operates independently of class position. However, it can be argued that occupational social class is better than education as an indicator of socioeconomic differences in mortality rates. Thus the cultural capital encapsulated in education does not flow through from a poor

Limitations of the social-capital approach

In short, the social-capital approach easily leads to a blame-the-victim approach, with the simple proviso that the victim is the community rather than the individuals. For example, a study of the higher prevalence of mental disorders in socioeconomically deprived urban areas in the Netherlands concluded that it was a consequence of the concentration of low socioeconomic status (SES) people in these communities – thereby blaming the individuals and the communities – and not the contextual factors of urban deprivation (Reijneveld and Schene 1998). It is clear that the two go together – that poor people live in areas of risk, and that they then suffer more. To disaggregate the two seems an unnecessary refinement. By contrast, a study of the material standards of living, social class and the prevalence of common mental disorders in Britain concluded that the significant causal variable was the poor material standard of living and low household income (Weich and Lewis 1998). It also found that increasing inequality in material standards of living was a major threat to health. Again it is the social structure that needs to be examined to explain the individual's condition, and not the reverse.

early-childhood exposure to disabling conditions (Smith 1998a). What appears to be most important about communities is equality of resources. For example, the greater the income equality the lower the population mortality rates for any community. The inequality of the socioeconomic environment is reflected in the inequalities of health and disease, thus demonstrating that the macro levels of the economy cannot be separated from the micro levels of individual experience. Homicide shows an even greater relationship to income inequality than does mortality from all other causes. In the US the data suggests that violent crime, excluding homicide, is also closely linked to income inequality and social trust. It has been argued that the experience of inequality leads to feelings of shame, humiliation and disrespect, which in turn are linked to psychosocial processes of inequality and violence (Wilkinson, Kawachi and Kennedy 1998; see also chapter 5, this volume).

Interventions at the individual level, when compared with population-health interventions, show little impact on health outcomes. In a study of the impact of targeting at-risk individuals of psychiatric disorders in South London, it was found that targeting individuals would result in a 9 per cent reduction of psychiatric disorder, while eliminating one item of socioeconomic adversity would result in a reduction of 18 per cent. In short, targeting individuals at risk will have a very limited outcome (Weich et al. 1997). As Shouls, Congdon and Curtis (1996:367) have argued, 'all individuals living in areas with high levels of illness (which tend to be deprived areas) show greater morbidity, even after allowing for their individual characteristics'. Further evidence that community-based interventions do work is provided by a cardiovascular-disease prevention program in Sweden. The aims were to bring down individual levels of chole-

terol concentration and to change dietary habits. While especially at-risk individuals were targeted, the overall emphasis was on the community. Over six years of the program, cholesterol levels were reduced significantly, by nearly 20 per cent. The cost savings in prevented disease under the most conservative assumptions were good. Even more importantly, the program had an equity effect, bringing the most-at-risk individuals up nearer to the least-at-risk individuals. Equity programs based on community interventions are cost-saving, prevent disease and change individual lifestyle patterns (Lindholm et al. 1996).

Work and unemployment

Living and working conditions have a major impact on the health of individuals, and largely determine their lifestyle habits. 'Job decision latitude', for example, has a direct bearing on the health of individuals. Those who have control over their workday, structuring the pace, stresses and rewards of work, have considerably better health. On the other hand, those with no latitude, no control over the content or speed of their work have much poorer health (Karasek and Theorell 1990). Work stressors and their links with cardiovascular-disease risk impact differently on men and women. In a study of work stressors (psychological demands, decision latitude and social support) and cardiovascular risk factors (hypertension, hyperlipidemia, diabetes, being overweight, smoking and alcohol consumption), it was found that men with low decision latitude had hypertension and higher alcohol consumption. Among women, low decision latitude was associated with hyperlipidemia and alcohol consumption, and high psychological demand with being overweight and smoking. Thus there is a direct link between work stressors through physiological mechanisms, and an indirect impact on health through lifestyle factors induced by work stress (Niedhammer et al. 1998). This has been supported in a Swedish study of women, which found that lifestyle factors such as smoking, sedentary lifestyle, alcohol consumption, obesity, excess abdominal fat and unhealthy diets did not explain raised lipid levels. Rather the crucial variables were decision latitude at work and annual income. Women with low decision latitude at work, poor incomes and low educational levels, and in blue-collar jobs, had the most unhealthy lipid profile, independently of lifestyle factors.

At the same time, having a job will not necessarily protect you from injury and disease. In Australia in 1996, 500 workers died at work, often in horrible incidents. An estimated 2,200 died of work-related cancers and 650,000 were injured or became sick directly because of their work each year (Industry Commission 1996). A more recent study (covering the period from 1989 to 1992) reported 2,389 workplace fatalities (National Occupational Health and Safety

Commission 2000). Work, socioeconomic factors and individuals' perceptions of poor health interact as predictors of severe long-term illness. Those who perceive themselves to be ill, and have high physical demands placed on them at work, are most at risk. As Blank and Diderichsen summarised their study of the experience of long-term illness:

manual workers are not only more exposed to causes of illness that have important individual and social consequences, but also to personal factors that determine different experiences of illness. Interaction between these two kinds of factors (job demands and self rated health) suggests that socio-economic and individual factors play different but complementary roles in the causal process leading to the experience of severe long-term illnesses. [Blank and Diderichsen 1996:161]

Unemployment: Does it cause or follow sickness?

It is often suggested that the sick become unemployed, and that there is a downward drift occurring. Sick people, it is argued, are poor labour-market competitors and therefore it is no surprise that there is a sick 'pool' at the bottom of society. At first glance this may appear to be a reasonable interpretation of the data. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that unemployed men aged between 15 and 24 were 64 per cent more likely to report fair or poor health, while unemployed women were 82 per cent more likely to report fair or poor health than their employed counterparts, and to suffer more chronic illness. Unemployed adults aged between 25 and 64 report worse health than the employed, with 26 per cent more serious chronic illness in the men and 42 per cent more chronic illness in the unemployed women. Australian men between 25 and 54 who are unemployed have an estimated death rate 16 per cent higher than employed men (Mathers 1994).

Importantly, the impact of unemployment flows through to the health of the next generation, with the children of the unemployed being significantly sicker than the children of the employed, with 27 per cent more chronic illness. Adult health is laid down in childhood and is a product of poor childhood socioeconomic status, as well as contributing to low adult socioeconomic status. Thus poor health in childhood sets up a vicious cycle of adult poor health and continuing poverty (Van de Mheem et al. 1998), of unemployment, and of chronic disease and early death.

But the data can also be examined and explained from the other direction. While the unemployed are sicker and unhealthier, it may be because they are unemployed, rather than a cause of their unemployment. Increasingly hazardous health behaviour follows becoming unemployed rather than preceding

it, including a slightly increased tendency to take up smoking and to drink more (Montgomery et al. 1998). There is now considerable evidence of the causal impact of becoming unemployed and deteriorating health in that order (Mathers and Schofield 1998). It has been argued that the unemployed are sick because they are more likely to drink at hazardous levels and be physically inactive. However, Mathers's research shows that while unemployed men and women between 25 and 64 were twice as likely to report being in fair or poor health, had up to 40 per cent more serious chronic illness and 30 per cent more recent health problems, smoking, binge drinking, being overweight and physical inactivity did not explain the differences. In other words, the fact of being unemployed makes you sick – not the individual actions that may then accompany it (Mathers 1994).

Australian socioeconomic patterns and health data

Australian data shows that the poorest members of society experience more ill health and sickness than those at the top. These differences are increasing across all measures of ill health, reflecting the growing divide between the rich and the poor. The bottom 10 per cent, reported worse health than the rest (Walker and Abello 2001). The National Health Strategy (NHSU 1992) shows the links between poverty, inequality and ill health, as does the summary of Colin Mathers's four volumes of inquiry into the health of children, young adults, adults and older Australians (Mathers, Vos and Stevenson 1999). Notwithstanding economic growth, poverty has remained high and the distribution of ill health down the social system reflects this (King 1998). The most economically and socially deprived sections of society have higher mortality rates, experience more ill health and use fewer preventative services.

These findings are documented over all stages of the life cycle, and are found no matter what measure of socioeconomic inequality is used. Infants from the lower socioeconomic strata have higher rates of decreased birth-weight, developmental delays, longer periods of acute illness, more diarrhoea and vomiting, higher levels of resuscitation after birth, higher rates of preterm delivery, lower birth-weights for gestational age, and longer than 2.8-day hospital stays after birth. They are also less likely to be breastfed, more likely to have shorter periods of breastfeeding, more likely to be fed solids earlier and more likely to be fed canned foods. At the same time their parents under-utilise health services, being less consistent antenatal visitors, and have fewer attendances at maternal and child-health services. Children in the lower socioeconomic category are at an increased risk of drowning involving bathtubs, have higher rates of mortality due to non-accidental injury and neglect, and are more

Comparison 1

For 15- to 24-year-olds in the bottom socioeconomic quintile:

- the all-cause death rate is 49 per cent higher for males and 54 per cent higher for females;
- homicide rates are more than 180 per cent higher for males and females;
- circulatory diseases are 110 per cent higher for males;
- respiratory diseases are 110 per cent higher for males; and
- the suicide rate 35 per cent higher for males.

likely to drown in swimming pools. In addition they have more chronic health problems, poorer dental health, poorer general health, a higher than average number of illness symptoms, and excessive colds, and experience developmental delays. They are also more likely to be diagnosed with behaviour disorders and social problems. Adolescent girls of low socioeconomic status are likely to be above average weight, and have a stronger negative correlation between self-esteem and body mass index. Adolescent boys have higher rates of psychiatric morbidity and poorer dietary intake, and are less likely to see a dentist or have orthodontic treatment.

These poor health conditions are only a small part of the problems that Turrell has summarised in his review of 202 empirical studies of socioeconomic status (SES) and health in Australia. As he puts it:

Taken as a whole, the evidence of SES and health in Australia is unequivocal: those who occupy positions at the lower end of socioeconomic hierarchy fare significantly worse in terms of their health. Specifically, persons variously classified as low SES have higher mortality rates for most major causes of death, their mortality profile indicates they experience more ill health, and their use of health care services suggests that they are less likely to act to prevent disease or detect it at a symptomatic stage. [Turrell et al. 1999:32]

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 1997) found that low-income groups are hospitalised more, have more outpatient visits and go to the doctor more frequently. In addition they are at an extraordinarily higher level of risk of sickness and death. The difference in disease and cause of death between young people aged between 15 and 24 in the poorest 5 per cent of the population, compared to those in the top socioeconomic 5 per cent of that age group, is summarised in ‘Comparison 1’ (comparisons reproduced from White, K. 2002b).

These inequalities among the youth are also found among older men and women in the bottom 5 per cent of the population compared with those in the top 5 per cent (Mathers 1994) (see ‘Comparison 2’, page 53).

Professional men have the lowest death rates (156 per 100,000) and those in blue-collar jobs – trades, transport, labour occupations – have the highest

Comparison 2

Men and women over 65 in the bottom quintile, compared with those in top:

- have total death rates that are 14 per cent higher for men and 11 per cent higher for women;
- have pneumonia and influenza rates that are 53 per cent higher for men and 16 per cent higher for women;
- have a diabetes rate that is 15 per cent higher for men and 32 per cent higher for women;
- have a prevalence of lung cancer that is 28 per cent higher for men;
- have a coronary heart disease rate that is 10 per cent higher for men and 15 per cent higher for women; and
- experience stroke at a 16 per cent higher rate for men and 6 per cent higher rate for women.

death rate (248 per 100,000). This is an overall differential of 59 per cent. As 'Comparison 3' shows, blue-collar men have higher death rates for most major causes of death (Mathers 1994).

Inequalities of health extend to the experience of illness and disease. Cancer, for example, is over-represented in the poor. Poor, homeless men in Britain have twice the rate of tumours of the mouth and pharynx than would be expected in the male population (Lamont, Toal and Crawford 1997). Survival rates from diseases such as cancer are linked to socioeconomic status, with those in higher groups surviving them better. Cass and colleagues have studied social disadvantage and variation in the incidence of end-stage renal disease (ESRD) in Australia (Cass, Cunningham and Wang et al. 2001). They found a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and ESRD within capital cities, with those in better-off areas having better outcomes, concluding:

to explain the significant association between relative disadvantage and the standardized incidence of ESRD observed in this study, we need to develop a framework for understanding the etiology of renal disease that encompasses social and environmental determinants of health. [Cass, Cunningham and Wang et al 2001:326]

Comparison 3

Causes of deaths of male blue-collar workers compared with professionals:

- pneumonia/influenza: 206 per cent higher;
- diabetes: 110 per cent higher;
- lung cancer: 99 per cent higher;
- bronchitis/emphysema/asthma: around 90 per cent higher;
- cardiovascular disease: 62 per cent higher;
- suicide: around 50 per cent higher; and
- stomach cancer: 48 per cent higher.

It is generally the case that upper-class males suffer less from diseases when they get them, and receive better treatment. A French study showed that while upper executives were less likely to suffer heart attacks, they were more likely to have had a coronography before the event if they did have an attack, and more likely to be hospitalised, thus increasing their survival rates (Lang 1998). In the case of cancer, those in lower social categories die more from treatable cancers than those in upper categories (Roberts et al. 1997; Rosso et al. 1997). Indeed, it is the case that improvements in the population's health are unequally distributed, again following patterns of inequality. A study of 105 District Health Authorities in England found that the largest gains in life expectancy are in the richest areas of the country, resulting in widening mortality rates in the poorest areas. In poor areas, gains were practically nonexistent (Raleigh 1997). In the context of overall widening inequality, AIDS and drug overdoses are emerging as major causes of early death in socioeconomically deprived areas of Europe, thus developing new forms of health inequality (Borrell 1997). The size of the problem is illustrated by English findings that the number of accidental, undetermined and suicidal deaths from heroin and/or methadone has risen by 900 per cent between 1974 and 1992 (Neeleman and Farrell 1997).

The '**health divide**' (Townsend and Davidson 1988) is worsening in industrial societies. The increasing socioeconomic differences in mortality among men in Great Britain, from 1951 to 1981, for specific diseases and for all-cause mortality, are reversing the trend towards more equitable distribution of health that occurred in the middle part of the twentieth century. Over the period, inequality increased in England, Wales and Scotland. The biggest increases in inequality were in Scotland, as were the greatest increases in all-cause mortality, and particularly cardiovascular disease, and accidents. To add insult to early death, the upper classes experienced a decline in death rates, while the lower classes experienced an increase in mortality (Marangvandemheen et al. 1998). Similarly, in Australia, a study of socioeconomic correlates of mortality differences between local government authorities (LGAs) in rural New South Wales found that 'although there has been an overall decline in death [for the four LGAs studied] the gap between the most disadvantaged and the least disadvantaged has widened over the last 15 years' (Xue, Robertson and Brett 2000:365). The research on the link between inequality and class, which this chapter has covered, can be summarised in the following statements:

- Social-class differences in mortality are widening.
- Better measures of class position – that is, socioeconomically more refined variables – show greater inequalities in mortality.
- Health inequalities have been shown in all countries that collect data.

- Social selection and measurement artefacts do not account for mortality differentials.
- Social-class differences exist for health during life as well as for length of life.
- Trends in the distribution of income suggest that further widening of differentials may be expected.

Conclusion

Socioeconomic status is usually regarded as a feature of individuals, determining their access to economic resources, and by extension their choices about food, drink and lifestyle. This in turn leads to an assumption of multiple causality, since there are as many causes of ill health as there are potentially individual patterns of behaviour, and this then makes it difficult to track down causes, which appear as variable as the individual behaviours. This assumption about the nature of inequality as an individual phenomenon appears on the surface to be confirmed by the lifestyle choices the poor make: they eat badly, do not take exercise, and smoke and drink to excess. There are two points to be made here. The first is that the poor do behave badly – they do have poorer eating habits, smoke more and drink more (Lynch, Kaplan and Salonen 1997). As Stephanie Short (1999) has pointed out, commentators have been quite clear on this since the nineteenth century and offered an explanation: the poor behave badly because they are treated badly. As Friedrich Engels put it in his masterpiece *The Condition of the Working Class in England*: ‘when a class can purchase few and only the most sensual pleasures by its wearying toil, must it not give itself over blindly and madly to those pleasures?’ (quoted in Short 1999:91). Engels went on to argue that alcoholism, for example, is not a psychological characteristic of individuals but an outcome of their position in the social structure. Lifestyle choices, while they appear to be decisions of individuals, are shaped for us by our social location. The second point is that poor people would prefer not to behave badly. Poor people seek out knowledge of healthy behaviour and do try to adopt healthy lifestyles. However, the situation that they find themselves in – put plainly, a shortage of time, space and money – inhibits them (Whitehead 1995). The third point is that lifestyle variables are not terribly important as determinants of the health of populations. Indeed, international studies have consistently shown that when lifestyles are taken into account the poor still have poorer health. Lifestyle may aggravate the situation in which the poor find themselves, but they do not cause it. For example, it is now known that a high level of work stress and low rewards is a significant factor in cardiovascular

risk. While people in the sorts of occupations that feature such factors also have lifestyle habits that are associated with heart disease, these factors do not explain their levels of heart attacks. An imbalance between effort and reward at work is specifically linked to cardiovascular risk, and the lack of physical exercise, increased body-weight and cigarette smoking did not account for the increased risk (Peter et al. 1998).

Health inequalities are not a matter of individual choice. Rather what appears to be the case is that unequal societies produce unequal health: an individual's experience of their biology is shaped by their society, and unequal societies are also the unhealthiest. Inequality produces sickness and disease. The focus of health policy should be on the structural features of inequality, rather than on individual behaviour.

Key terms and concepts

- Class
- Work
- Socioeconomic status
- Genetic
- Lifestyle
- Social capital
- Social gradient of disease
- Blame the victim
- Community
- Health divide

Study questions

- 1 In what ways are sickness and disease socially produced and distributed?
- 2 How does our position in the economic structure determine the sickness and disease we experience?
- 3 How free are individuals to make choices about health lifestyles?
- 4 In what ways do genetic explanations of disease undermine social explanations?
- 5 How is inequality linked to patterns of health?
- 6 Why is social capital not enough to improve a community's health?

Further reading

- Blane, D., E. Brunner and R. Wilkinson (eds). 1996. *Health and Social Organisation: Towards a Health Policy for the Twenty First Century*. London: Routledge.
A comprehensive overview of the social factors that produce unequal patterns of health.
- Townsend, P, and N. Davidson (eds). 1988. *Inequalities in Health: The Black Report and the Health Divide*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

The classic study of inequality in late-twentieth-century England showing the huge differences in health between those at the bottom and those at the top of the social system.

Turrell, G. 1995. 'Social Class and Health: A Summary of the Overseas and Australian Evidence' in *Sociology of Health and Illness: Australian Readings*. Edited by G. Lupton and J. Najman. Melbourne: Macmillan.

A good overview of Australian data on health inequalities.

Wilkinson, R., and M. Marmot (eds). 1998. *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*. Copenhagen: Centre for Urban Health, World Health Organisation, Regional Office for Europe.

The ten known social determinants of ill health and the unequal distribution of disease in western societies, as determined by an international team of experts for the World Health Organisation.

Wilkinson, R.G. 1996. *Unhealthy Societies: The Afflictions of Inequality*. London: Routledge.

A comprehensive review of the impact of unequal societies on the distribution of patterns of health and illness.

4 Gendered, Aged and Disabled Bodies

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In this chapter we show the contours of gendered health and its relationship, particularly for women, to the care of the elderly and the disabled. We argue that women’s bodies are the product of and a response to patriarchal dominance, as a part of which they have been subjected to the sustained **medicalisation** of their life cycle in which socially produced inequality in **gender** roles is made to appear as the ‘natural’ outcome of women’s biology (Barker 1998; Fee and Krieger 1995). By medicalisation we mean the process by which ‘normal’ events – such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause – are turned into medical events requiring the constant supervision and intervention of medical practitioners. Women’s bodies are constructed in medical knowledge and practices as inherently sick and in need of constant surveillance. At the same time, medicine constructs women as ‘naturally’ caring and nurturing.

Feminist sociologists argue that medicine in modern society functions to enshrine as 'natural' the caring and nurturing roles that women play, especially in the care of the disabled and the elderly. In a capitalist society the ability to work is still central to the definition of what it is to have a normal body, and bodies that do not meet this criterion are stigmatised and suffer **social marginalisation** and **social exclusion** as a consequence. Thus the construction of women by medicine ensures that they are the ones who do the caring and nurturing of those with similarly socially stigmatised bodies, the aged and the disabled.

Marxist-feminists argue that the construction of women as the natural caregivers in society is central to the maintenance of capitalism. For example, were women carers of the disabled and the aged in the informal sector to be paid for what they do, the cost to the state, which would have to be raised by taxes, would be minimally \$20 billion a year in Australia. Thus the ascription of caring and nurturing roles to women in a patriarchal society by the medical profession is no coincidence in the light of the unmet need for care of the elderly and the disabled by the state and by capital.

We argue that in attempting to meet the demands placed on them, women play roles that put them at risk of sickness, and at increased risk of medical attention. We also argue against current government initiatives that suggest that there is yet more scope for the family and community to play in the care of the elderly and disabled. This retreat from a government-centred provision of services to these groups will lead to more inequality and to a greater burden of care on women. The elderly are being constructed as a sick group who are a burden on the community, and this framework is being used to advance a set of social policies that call on them to take more responsibility for themselves. We argue that there is no clear evidence – in fact the strength of it goes to the opposite conclusion – that the elderly are sicker, or costing the welfare services system more. Overseas evidence shows clearly that individualistic solutions to the care of the elderly will lead to greater inequality of life chances, and ultimately cost the health-and-welfare services more. Australian evidence is that despite the increase in number of elderly people, more has not been spent on them by the government, and that the majority of the care and support they receive is provided by other elderly people in the community.

Gender and health

Sociologists make an important distinction between sex and gender. Sex is the underlying biological reality that distinguishes male from female. However, what makes us feminine or masculine is a product of how we are socialised to act as women and men. This is a social and political process and not a direct

extension of nature. Hence sociologists argue that differences in men's and women's health is the product of the way they have to live out their social existence, and not of their biology. Being socialised as a man or a woman will lead to quite clear differences in health outcomes, which are the consequence of the organisation of social life and not biology.

The two consistent findings relating to the health of women are that they are diagnosed as suffering from more ill health and paradoxically that they live longer. In Australia, women's life expectancy is greater than men's, while non-Aboriginal women live longer than Aboriginal women. In 1998 the life expectancy of men was 75.9 years and of women 81.5 years. The leading causes of death for both men and women are ischaemic heart disease and stroke. For women then follows depression, dementia and breast cancer. For men it is lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and suicide (AIHW 200a:54). In the category of young males and young females (aged 12 to 24) there are three male deaths for every female death, with the young men mainly dying of suicide and accident. Young females do worse in depressive disorders, with three times the rate of young men. They are also hospitalised at a greater rate for attempted suicide. Death rates for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are 2.8 times higher for young men and 2.0 times higher for young women than for the non-indigenous population (see chapter 6).

Women, gender and health

There are clear sociological reasons why women appear to be sicker. Between the ages of 15 and 44 they are hospitalised at a higher rate than men. However, this is largely because this is their period of reproduction; outside of these years they are hospitalised less than men. The medicalisation of childbirth – turning it into a biotechnical problem in need of medical control – has contributed to the construction of healthy pregnant women as in constant need of medical interventions. This is reflected in the caesarean-section delivery rates in Australia. Australia had high rates of caesarean section in 1997, at 20.3 per cent of all deliveries. This has increased to 21.9 per cent of all deliveries in 1999. Older mothers, those having their first baby and those with private medical insurance were most likely to have a caesarean. In fact for older mothers having their first baby and with private insurance, the rate of caesarean section was 35 per cent (Nassar and Sullivan 2001). A major variable in whether or not a caesarean section is performed is private health insurance. In private hospitals the caesarean-section rate was 29.5 per cent in 1999, which is 53 per cent higher than the rate of 19 per cent for women in public hospitals (Nassar and Sullivan 2001:18). The World Health Organisation has expressed concern about the number of interventions in pregnancy and rec-

ommends that the maximum number of caesarean sections should be between 10 and 15 per cent.

The biomedical focus on women's reproductive capacity in western societies means that they are systematically targeted in screening programs for cervical cancer and breast cancer, which urge them to have check-ups on a regular basis. Armstrong (1995) argues that in what he terms *surveillance medicine*, the search for the abnormal few with 'invisible diseases' justifies the surveillance of the 'normal' majority. Thus, otherwise well women routinely present themselves to the health-care system, leading to statistics that show they are high users of it and giving the impression that they are sick. Health-promotion campaigns target the healthy population using fear campaigns and emphasising the risks at which people are putting themselves by not having check-ups (Lupton 1995). Furthermore, they target young women who are least likely to develop breast cancer. As Kuni puts it:

A darker side of the lay press campaigns is the use of fear and guilt to achieve compliance. Statistics are often misused, and the judgment of women who question the value of mammography is criticised. [Kuni 1993:186]

Breast cancer and its associated mass mammography raise many of the issues concerned with medicalisation of women's bodies, patriarchy and surveillance.

Women are also over-represented in the health statistics as a consequence of their caretaker roles of children – involving antenatal care and family planning – as well as for taking responsibility for other adults in the household, and for their extended family (Abel and Nelson 1990). Women's role as caretaker of infants and children – especially when they are sick or receiving preventative health services – contributes to the medicalisation of women (Prout 1988). Since the 1950s, doctors have been attributing disorders in children, such as asthma, colic and eczema, to psychological disorders in mothers (Contratto 1984), and mothers seeking medical advice on behalf of their children are met with prejudice, hostility and derision (Lennane and Lennane 1973). The mother is often prescribed drugs – tranquillisers – to treat her for her child's problem (Phillips, J. 1983). Women are regularly blamed for their children's sickness. For example, Bennett and Haggard (1998) argued that women's smoking patterns in the home were a causative factor in middle-ear infection of children. Having controlled for socioeconomic factors (that is, broader structural factors), they argued that a mother's smoking habits, and the use of day care, put a male child at risk of middle-ear infection. The father's smoking habits, on the other hand, were not found to be significant. Whether or not the explanation is correct is beside the point of the impact of this finding. The net result is to blame mothers for smoking and for using child care, and has to be read as an attack on women. Another example is a study of the impact of deprivation, crowding, maternal smoking and breastfeeding on wheeze and diarrhoea in infants. While rented accommodation,

overcrowded housing conditions, and the number of siblings were clear factors involved in the children's sickness, the conclusion was that if the mothers breast-fed this gave a protective covering to the infant (Baker, Taylor and Henderson 1998). Again the correlation may be there, but to focus on it detracts from the clearly demonstrated economic and political factors that are operating, and reinforces the nurturing roles of women as natural.

The over-representation of women in the health system is also a result of the social roles women are forced into. Early research suggested that while marriage was beneficial for men's mental health it was a negative factor in women's mental health (Bernard 1972). There is some evidence now, though, that marriage may be healthy for women and lead to less assault and fewer non-fatal accidents (Cheung 1998). Family roles may also be good for women. As Arber (1991:425) has argued:

Family roles are important for women; women without children and previously married women have particularly poor health status especially those not in paid employment and living in local authority housing.

It is notable, though, that Arber's account is cut through with the wider problem of poverty, a burden that is systematically distributed by gender, affecting divorced women most. The feminisation of poverty sets up a vicious cycle wherein women's health is put at greater risk, they have fewer resources to enable them to cope, and in turn get sicker (Gimenez 1989). It is hard to draw any strong conclusions about the impact of caring roles and paid work on women's health. On balance, the most likely conclusion is that paid work protects women from the stresses of the nurturing role they play in the home and enhances their self-image (Lennon 1994).

In general, though, women's social roles are bad for their health. Women have lower status, work for longer hours, have lower wages, do more unpaid work, have greater social and emotional commitments, and get fewer hours of sleep and leisure (Bird and Fremont 1991). There is also evidence that the house is physically a dangerous workplace. Women home-workers have been found to have high cancer rates, which may be attributable to the unregulated toxic materials in the 'cottage industry' of the home (Morton and Ungs 1979). Doyal and Pennell (1979:74) have reported that of the 6,245 deaths in home accidents in 1971, 35.3 per cent happened to men, while 64.7 per cent happened to women. Australian studies fifteen years later show that half of all accidents in the home happen to women, with men counting for only 21 per cent and children 29 per cent (Broom 1986).

The final factor in providing an explanation for the apparent high numbers of sick women is that women and men are socialised differently to experience and report their bodily sensations. Women are more likely to consult doctors on how they feel, whereas men are more likely to avoid a consultation unless it

is based on physical factors. It is for this reason that men are less likely to be diagnosed to be suffering from stress or depression, and more likely to be diagnosed as having a physical ailment (Verbrugge 1989).

Gendered differences in sickness and death

Epidemiologists examine the impact of disease and death in the population using measures of the ‘burden of disease’; that is, disability through ill health, and preventable death. These measures are: years of life lost due to premature mortality (YLL), and the impact of disability (YLD) – that is, the number of healthy years that have been forfeited. The addition of YLL and YLD gives the total number of years lost to disability and premature death (DALYs). One DALY equals one lost year of life (AIHW 200a:192). In 1996 premature mortality was responsible for 1.35 million years of life lost (YLL), with men losing 26 per cent more years than women (AIHW 2000a:51).

Table 4.1 summarises DALYs in Australia, demonstrating significant differences in the health of men and women. Put straightforwardly, men die of largely preventable diseases, while women experience more disability from ill health. Young men aged 20 to 24 die at three times the rate of young women, from suicide, accidents and alcohol abuse. Otherwise biologically healthy men are dying more, while women suffer more.

Men, gender and health

Although women’s experiences of sickness and disease have long been recognised as a product of their social roles, it is only more recently that men’s health and illness behaviour has been seen in the same light (Cameron and Bernardes 1998; Fletcher 1996). This has led to an examination of the impact of men’s socialisation into their gender roles on their health. Masculinity is usually assumed to benefit men, but what if it kills them? This argument can be advanced using Connell’s (1987) notion of **hegemonic masculinity**. Connell argues that the dominant view of what it is to be male in Australia is one of aggressive, risk-taking behaviour. Thus the accidents young men die in – mainly car crashes – are the outcome of attempting to measure up to this standard. Furthermore, in this model of masculinity, men are socialised not to pay attention to their bodily or emotional experiences. Thus when they are sick they do not seek help. Young men turn in on themselves when emotionally stressed, attempting to mask their experiences through drugs, providing part of the explanation of the high death rates from alcohol-related abuse and drug abuse. In turn, drug taking, and especially alcohol use, leads to risky behaviour, setting up a vicious cycle of risk taking, increased disease and high death rates. This form

Table 4.1 Morbidity and mortality differences between men and women

Men: Condition	DALYs	% of total	Women: Condition	DALYs	% of total
25–44 years			25–44 years		
Suicide and self-inflicted injuries	23,296	10.3	Depression	23,546	12.7
Depression	16,287	7.4	Anxiety disorder	11,529	6.2
Road-traffic accidents	14,929	6.6	Breast cancer	9,025	4.9
Alcohol dependence and harmful use	13,026	5.8	Asthma	6,548	3.5
HIV/AIDS	10,250	4.5	Genito-urinary	7,836	4.2
All causes total	225,873		All causes total	185,318	
45–64 years			45–64 years		
Ischaemic heart disease	57,521	16.7	Breast cancer	25,451	10.0
Lung cancer	22,509	6.5	Osteoarthritis	16,655	6.6
COPD	16,999	4.9	Ischaemic heart disease	16,381	6.5
Hearing loss	15,861	4.6	Diabetes mellitus	14,232	5.6
Diabetes mellitus	15,711	4.6	Depression	13,237	5.2
All causes total	345,095		All causes total	253,514	
65 years and over			65 years and over		
Ischaemic heart disease	113,681	21.7	Ischaemic heart disease	111,267	20.3
Stroke	45,111	8.6	Stroke	58,894	10.7
Lung cancer	36,206	6.9	Alzheimer's	48,946	8.9
COPD	30,348	5.8	COPD	21,838	4.0
Alzheimer's/dementias	27,804	5.3	Breast cancer	19,627	3.6
All causes total	523,774		All causes total	549,228	

Marital status, gender and age: Morbidity and mortality

- Death rates for older unmarried men and women are 40 per cent higher than for older married men and women.
- Death from pneumonia and influenza is 150 per cent higher for never-married men and women.
- Death from pneumonia and influenza is 100 per cent higher for divorced and widowed men and women.
- Unmarried men have a suicide rate 140 per cent higher than married men.
- Suicide rates are 125 per cent higher for divorced and widowed women.
- Death from diabetes is 43 per cent and 37 per cent higher for divorced or separated men and women.

of masculinity has its counterpart among the middle-aged and young-elderly males, with a subjugation of emotional self-identity and denial of bodily symptoms meaning that while they escape medicalisation they are discovered to be much sicker much later, with much less likely chance of successful treatment.

Although gender identity clearly plays a strong part in explaining men's behaviour, it also interacts with class position. Between 1985–87 and 1995–97 the gap between death rates for men between the lowest and the highest socio-economic strata worsened, while it improved for women. Those men in the bottom 20 per cent were 1.7 times more likely to die than those in the top 20 per cent, and 1.4 per cent more likely to be hospitalised (AIHW 2000a:192). Men are also at risk of poor health from having poor **social networks**. In a US study, 36,624 males who were free of coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer were followed up over four years in terms of their social networks. During that period 511 of them died, and men with poor social networks – not married, with fewer than six friends or relatives, and no membership of church or community groups – were at increased risk of cardiovascular-disease mortality, and deaths from accidents and suicides. They were also at increased risk of stroke. Furthermore, those with strong social networks survive coronary heart disease better (Kawachi et al. 1996). Following separation or divorce, men and women are at risk of social exclusion and of poor social support, two key variables identified by the World Health Organisation as predictors of poor health and early death (Wilkinson and Marmot 1998). The consequences of social exclusion, poor social support and poorer social networks are reflected in the differences in morbidity and mortality between married and unmarried men and women (AIHW 1999b) (see 'Marital status, gender and age').

The family, the aged and the disabled

Following the 1998 election, Prime Minister John Howard announced a new series of assumptions about the delivery of welfare services. He advocated

Household expenditure of time on welfare services, 1997

- Total hours spent on welfare services: 1,727 million hours.
- Time spent helping other adults, friends and neighbours: 1,144 million hours (66.2 per cent).
- Time spent on child-care-related activities: 503 million hours (29.1 per cent).
- Time spent on voluntary community-service organisations: 80.3 million hours (4.6 per cent).

early intervention to minimise the need for state-provided welfare and the provision of a welfare safety net. Most importantly, he argued, the need was for the development of strong families and strong communities. These in turn would foster self-reliance and independence (Howard 1998). This initiative was consolidated by Howard in 1999 with the launch of National Families Strategy (Howard 1999).

Current government policy overlooks the role the household sector already plays in the welfare services sector, which is not costed at the national level. For example, the unpaid labour in the provision of welfare services provided by households and the voluntary sector during 1997–98 was conservatively estimated at \$24.5 billion, which was more than double the Federal Government's direct monetary expenditure of \$10.9 billion during the same period (AIHW 1999a:32). In the household/community sector, of those providing care for others, 98.9 per cent was unpaid labour (1.1 per cent was for paid child care in the informal sector) (AIHW 1999a:10). There are two other measures that capture the size of the voluntary and household 'contribution' to the health and welfare services. The first is that the rate of recurrent expenditure of non-government community-service organisations has been increasing markedly, by an average of 8.9 per cent a year between 1992–93 and 1997–98, or in money terms, from \$3,928 million to \$6,013 million (AIHW 1999a:27). The second way of capturing the size of community voluntary work is estimates that it is equivalent to 63,000 people working a thirty-eight-hour week for 220 days a year (AIHW 1999a: 54).

The contraction of the welfare state has meant that the care of the disabled and the elderly is pushed back on women in the home as unpaid labour. Under the current government's health policies, health care has shifted from the public to the private sphere. One way to demonstrate this is to examine exactly how much time individuals spend on providing informal welfare services. In 1997 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducted a time-use survey to determine how Australians allocate time to various activities, including the performance of informal welfare services (AIHW 1999a:30) (see 'Household expenditure of time on welfare services, 1997').

The push back to the family in current government policies will exacerbate the unequal load that women already carry in this sector. For example, if the above hours of welfare service work are broken down by gender, then significant differ-

Household expenditure of time on welfare services, 1997, by gender

- Of the 1,727 million hours, women provided 62.2 per cent of services or care.
- Women spent 33.8 per cent (and men 21.5 per cent) of their time on child-care-related activities.
- Women provided the bulk of voluntary community-service activities. Of the total 80.3 million hours, 54.2 million hours (67.5 per cent) were contributed by women, while men contributed 32.5 per cent.

ences in who is doing the caring emerge between men and women (see 'Household expenditure of time on welfare services, 1997, by gender', page 67)).

The larger input by women has been calculated in financial terms. The total value of the unpaid welfare services provided by women, were it to be paid for by the Federal Government, is \$14.6 billion, and for men \$9.9 billion. These are conservative figures, because they do not include estimates of the costs of superannuation, long-service leave, holiday loading or sick pay (AIHW 1999a:32).

Although women have experienced increased participation in the paid workforce, there has not been a corresponding change in their activities at home (Bittman and Pixley 1997). While women are doing slightly less unpaid domestic work than they used to, they are still working longer hours, and have experienced a loss of leisure time (Baxter, Gibson and Lynch-Blosse 1990). In the 1930s the participation of married women in the labour force was less than 6 per cent. By 1998 it was 62 per cent. This development goes with other significant social changes. For example, marriage, in and of itself, is no longer a barrier to women working, nor is having children. In 1998, of women with a child under five, almost 50 per cent were in full-time paid employment (AIHW 1999a:48). Between 1966 and 1998 the employment rates for men and women moved closer, as the participation of older men decreased and that of younger women increased. Thus women are experiencing changed social and economic roles in society, with implications for patterns of health inequality. For example, the impact of smoking-related diseases has decreased in men but increased in women. From 1981 to 1996 the mortality burden of lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease has decreased by 15 per cent and 16 per cent respectively for men, but increased 62 per cent and 70 per cent for women (AIHW 2000a:52).

Age and older women

Women live longer than men, but are also poorer, and more commonly disabled and living in care. In all, 56 per cent of older people are women. With ageing goes a series of changes that represents a diminution of activities. These are

classified by the ABS as follows. Profound and severe core-activity restrictions mean that a person is unable to perform a core activity on their own, or always needs assistance in doing it. Core activities are self-care (bathing, showering, dressing, eating, using the toilet and managing incontinence), mobility (moving around at home and away from home, getting into or out of a bed or chair, and using public transport) and communication (understanding and being understood by others, including strangers, families and friends). For people below the age of 75, rates of profound or severe disability are relatively low (7.8 per cent of men and 9.2 per cent of women). With increasing age they become more significant, as do the gender differences. Of those between the ages of 75 and 79, 19 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women reported a profound or severe core-activity restriction, while for those between the ages 80 and 84 the rates increased to 24 per cent of men and 36 per cent of women (AIHW 1999a:169).

So who cares for these people? According to the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, conducted in 1998, there are 447,900 primary carers – that is, carers providing most assistance in the core-activity areas of mobility, self-care and communication – providing informal care in Australia. Of these carers, 70 per cent were women, with more than 50 per cent of them providing more than forty hours of care a week, and 22 per cent of these were themselves aged over 65. Furthermore, while men involved in care are predominantly looking after their spouse, for all age groups, only 34 per cent of the women are likely to be looking after their spouse (AIHW 1999a:174). Drawing these figures together, we can say that women provide most of the informal care of the aged, whether family or not, and they continue to do so even when they become aged themselves. The huge burden placed on the informal sector, and especially care for the aged, is one consequence of policy changes implemented by the Howard government in the 1998–99 budget, which emphasises individual self-responsibility and sets out to keep older people in the home and to be cared for by the community (Bishop 1999). A similar picture emerges of the role of the informal sector in the care of disabled bodies.

Constructing disabled bodies

The very idea of disability is historically specific to capitalist societies and has developed since the nineteenth century, when the need for labourers with bodies that could be tailored to the factory system first arose (Finkelstein 1980; Oliver 1990). Anyone falling outside this economically defined norm was excluded from the production process, and from participation in society, coming under the jurisdiction of the medical profession and its newly created asylums and hospitals (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare 1999). Thus disability is a social experience produced out of economic definitions of the good, useful body.

The International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) sorts disabilities into three categories: impairment of body function and structure, activity limitations, and participation restriction. Importantly, it recognises that disability outcomes are as much a product of the social and built environment as of biological events. In Australia in 1998, 3,610,300 people reported disability. Of these, 2,385,100 were under 65, and 53.8 per cent were male and 46.2 per cent female (AIHW 1999b:216). The highest rate of disability (10.7 per cent) is associated with physical conditions, such as arthritis and musculoskeletal disorders; 1.6 per cent have intellectual disability, followed by sensory (1.2 per cent) and psychiatric conditions (1.1 per cent). The number of people with a disability and specific restrictions has increased between 1993 and 1998. Those with profound or core-activity restriction increased from 2.7 per cent to 3.4 per cent of those aged between 5 and 14 years, and from 2.4 per cent to 3.3 per cent for people aged 15 to 64 years (AIHW 1999b:222). These increases may reflect changing diagnoses of conditions, or increases in accidents, with 590,600 of the disabled population reporting their condition was due to accident or injury. As an example, in 1998, 278 people were discharged from spinal treatment units with quadriplegia or paraplegia caused by accidents, 140 of them car accidents.

In 1998, 1,895,100 people needed help with their daily life. Of these, 87 per cent received informal help, 47.6 per cent received formal services and 3.9 per cent received no help. The informal help was almost entirely contributed by family members, either caring for a partner or a child, with 178,300 women and 74,800 men involved. More than one-third of the carers spent an average of forty hours a week providing care, and many had been doing so for between ten and twenty years (AIHW 1999b:248–50). Ongoing deinstitutionalisation is putting even greater burdens on the community services and the families involved. The number of people in ongoing need of support in the home increased from 244,100 to 349,100 between 1981 and 1993.

Disability is as much about social factors as it is about the actual biological condition. Access to buildings and transport, and the attitudes of others in the workplace have a marked impact on the participation of the disabled in social and economic life. The basis for a social model of disability was laid in the 1970s by the Union of Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS). In *The Fundamental Principles of Disability* (1976), they rejected medical and individualised definitions of disability. Instead they defined disability as:

the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary organization which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.
[UPIAS 1976:114]

As Barnes was to phrase it in 1994, disabled people suffer not only because of their condition, but also because of the reactions of others to them, resulting in

Social consequences of disability

- Of people with a disability, 37.3 per cent are employed, compared with 72.2 per cent of people without disabilities.
- Of people with a disability, 11.7 per cent are unemployed, compared with 7.8 per cent of people without disabilities.
- Of all people with a disability, 54.2 per cent have no post-school qualification.
- The disabled are over-represented in the poor; 70 per cent of those with a profound activity restriction and 56 per cent of those with a severe activity restriction are in the lowest two income quintiles, compared with 31 per cent of the population (AIHW 1999b:215–16).

‘(dis)ablism’; that is, institutionalised discrimination (Barnes 1994). This results in poor social life, lack of access to public spaces, less participation in the educational system, and less participation in the workforce. Australian data certainly supports this analysis (see ‘Social consequences of disability’).

As of 1999, no standards had been enacted in the Disability Discrimination Act, though progress was being made in terms of access to public transport, to premises and to education (AIHW 1999b:228).

Structuring new forms of inequality: The increase in ageing bodies

In this section we demonstrate how new forms of inequality are produced by the individualising assumptions of two recent government reports in the field of ageing. We also show that there is an attempt to demonise the aged as a sick group, becoming more dependent on welfare and health-care services at great cost to the community. While it is certain that the aged section of the population is growing, there is contested evidence that they are sicker, and as yet no evidence that more is being spent on them from welfare or health services. There is evidence of continued voluntary work among the aged, and especially among women. In short, the aged are not costing more, and they are already carrying a large burden of care in their own community.

Australia’s ageing population has been growing because since 1971 the level of fertility has decreased, and since 1976 the birthrate has been below replacement level. Simultaneously, mortality has declined and life expectancy increased. In this process the baby boomers are playing a critical demographic role. The *baby boom* refers to the increased birthrates between 1946 and 1961, in which more women had children, though the size of families did not increase. It is the ageing of this group that is leading to the ageing of the population. Between 1997 and 2006 the population aged between 50 and 64 years will increase at a higher rate than the population aged 65 years and over. Following this, the population aged over 65 will grow faster. The ageing of baby boomers

will peak between 2001 and 2021. In 1997, 12.2 per cent of the population was over 65. This will increase to 17.6 per cent (4 million people) in 2021, and to between 23.7 per cent and 25.6 per cent (6 million people) in 2051. It is the size of these increases that is notable. Between 1997 and 2051, the number of people aged 75 years and over is projected to increase by around 3.5 times, and to increase by 5.3 times for people aged 85 and over (AIHW 2000a).

Putting these statistics in a nutshell, demographic forecasts of an ageing Australian population are dramatic: between 2001 and 2051 the proportion of the population aged over 80 will increase by 307 per cent, while the proportion of those aged between 60 and 79 will increase by 122 per cent. At the same time, there will be negligible increases in those aged between 20 and 39 years, only 2 per cent (ABS 1999a). One implication of these figures is that the shrinking taxable, productive sector of the population will have to support a growing, large unproductive sector, with an inevitable decline in the standard of living overall, and increasing government expenditure. The argument is that the elderly, who will be increasingly sick, should prepare to look after themselves in their old age and be more self-reliant. Other analysts are more sceptical about any necessary conclusions being drawn from these statistics, and the attempt to do so has been labelled ‘alarmist demography’ (Katz 1992:204). For example, already the ageing population can be shown not to be sicker, and not to be forcing welfare costs up. Rather, they are looking after themselves and others in the community.

Constructing the elderly as sick

Old age in western societies is a period characterised by social disengagement in which our bodily changes are interlinked with social evaluations of those changes. Because of our cultural focus on biological markers of life stages, we have defined old age with reference to decline and loss of function, devaluing the elderly and using biomedical assumptions to justify the inequality – especially in terms of social participation and marginality – they experience. In short, our society presents us with a medicalised image of old age as inevitably malfunctioning bodies (Oberg 1996). However, being old is a social process as much as a biomedical one. Old age is not a straightforward biological fact, but an interlinking of chronology, physiology and social roles (Phillipson 1998). Specific social markers and assumptions go to make up the concept of old age. Some of these are institutional, such as the retirement and pension age, marking a disengagement from the public world of work. Others are enshrined within the medical science of gerontology – that the old aged are in decline, less active, and at triple jeopardy of disease and sickness from the loss of income, the loss of a spouse and the loss of social networks (Armstrong 1983).

Mortality and morbidity for elderly men and women at greatest socioeconomic disadvantage

- Men in the bottom 5 per cent have influenza/pneumonia rates 53 per cent higher than those in the top 5 per cent; women in the bottom group have 11 per cent higher rates than those in the top.
- For men diabetes rates are 15 per cent higher, for women 32 per cent higher.
- Lung-cancer rates are 28 per cent higher for men.
- Bronchitis, emphysema and asthma rates are 18 per cent higher for men.
- Coronary heart disease is 10 per cent higher for men and 15 per cent higher for women.
- Stroke rates are 16 per cent higher for men and 6 per cent higher for women.

In this regard, not only is old age a socially produced category, but it is also one that has virtually no positive features.

Implicit in the debate about the impact of the ageing population on expenditure is the assumption that the elderly are sick, disabled and spend more on health-care services. The assumption is that there is a negative relationship between increases in length of life and illness, disability and handicap. On the surface it might appear that the age structure is the main factor in the increased reports of severe handicap in the population. It is the case that between 1981 and 1988 the overall age-standardised prevalence rates of severe handicap have increased by 17 to 18 per cent for persons aged over 65. However, these figures do not relate to 'real' increases in disability in the older population, but are more likely to be the result of changes in the survey method over this period, and the efforts made to identify more cases (AIHW 2000b). To the extent that there is an increased reporting of disability and handicap, this is shaped by changes in perceptions and awareness of disability and health, changing social attitudes, and even more importantly, economic factors – especially changing definitions of sickness and disability for insurance purposes.

Are old people sicker? One argument is that they are, but that the period of sickness has been compressed to the end stages of life (Fries 1989), while others argue that there are more frail elderly, with an increase in disabling conditions (Hugo 1998). However, there is no clear link between greater longevity and trends in morbidity and disability. Overseas evidence suggests that while there is a compression of disability towards the end of life, there is also a slowing down of degenerative disease, and that the older population is getting healthier (Olshansky and Ault 1986). In Australia the latest evidence is that there is no growth in morbidity from the more severe disabilities (Mathers 1998).

It is important to recognise the health of the elderly is also structured unevenly by class, gender and ethnicity, with those of low socioeconomic status experiencing much poorer health, and men experiencing much poorer health in old age than women. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, using area

of residence as a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage, has calculated the differences between those in the top 5 per cent of the elderly population and those in the bottom 5 per cent (AIHW 1999b) (see 'Mortality and morbidity for elderly men and women at greatest socioeconomic disadvantage', page 72).

The 'increasing' cost of the elderly

Is Australia's aged population growing so fast that government expenditure to support it will become unsustainable? Internationally, this is the assumption made by the World Bank in *Averting the Old Age Crisis* (1994). Within Australia, two major reports have been central to this debate, both suggesting a highly pessimistic future. The Economic Planning and Advisory Council published a report in 1994 on the economic and social implications of ageing in Australia (Clare and Tulpule 1994). It suggested that welfare expenditure would rise from 6.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1990 to 9.3 per cent by 2051. Health expenditure would rise from 8.4 per cent of GDP in 1990 to 11.1 per cent of projected GDP in 2051. In one statistic, they suggested that health-care expenditure on older people could increase from about 35 per cent of total health expenditure in 1990 to 50 per cent in 2051. A second report, by the National Commission of Audit (NCA) in 1996, argued that the aged-dependency ratio (that is, those over 65 compared with those aged 18 to 64) would increase from the current level of 19 per cent to 39 per cent by 2041. Consequently health and aged-care costs would increase from a current level of 8.4 per cent of GDP to 14.5 per cent by 2030. The solution offered by the report was to make individuals more responsible for themselves: to 'moderate community expectations of government assistance, [and to] increase incentives for self reliance in older age' (National Commission of Audit 1996:121).

The report was widely criticised, not least for its narrow focus on the economic costs of ageing (Saunders 1996). Its key assumptions were also questioned. There is no consistent relationship between demographic trends of ageing and levels of health expenditure in Australia, or in other OECD countries. In fact Australian evidence shows that, despite a rapidly ageing population, between 1980–81 and 1995–96, government expenditure as a proportion of GDP remained unchanged at 5.1 per cent. As a proportion of total government outlays, spending on older Australians actually declined from 14.1 per cent to 13.4 per cent; and as a proportion of spending on health, welfare and social security, spending on older Australians in this period went down from 43 per cent to 32.8 per cent (Choi 1998). There is no reason to suppose that there will be a high growth rate in expenditure on health, while GDP has a low growth rate, and the assumption of high growth is not supported by European evidence. It would take only small changes in the allocation of Australia's health budget

to accommodate an ageing population. Finally, it is in no way economically impossible for Australia to support its ageing population (Howe 1997). Howe has suggested that rather than focusing solely on the proportion of the GDP being spent on the elderly, it would be better to address the question of whether the expenditure on health care produces good health – in other words, to be sure that we are getting value for money for our health expenditure.

Over and above these criticisms is more fundamental evidence that an ageing population and increasing expenditure on health are not necessarily linked, and that individualistic and market-based solutions will lead to further inequalities (Hassan 2000). This argument has been advanced by Hassan in two different ways. On the one hand, the United States, with the lowest proportion of elderly in its population (12.6 per cent) in the twelve most developed countries, has the highest percentage of GDP spending on health care – that is, 14 per cent. In Sweden, by contrast, with 17.8 per cent of its population over 65, only 7.5 per cent of GDP is spent on health. On the other hand, countries that have experienced rapid increases in the growth of their elderly population have not experienced corresponding growth in health-care expenditure, where central government has retained a role in the provision of services. In Japan between 1980 and 1990 there was a 30 per cent increase in the number of elderly, but only a 1.6 per cent increase in GDP on health care. Over the same period, the over-65-year-olds increased in the United States by 10 per cent, while health-care spending increased by 31.5 per cent. The critical variable is the role of the government. Where delivery of health-care services to the elderly is left to the private sector, costs increase astronomically. As Hassan (2000:602) puts it:

This means that more egalitarian industrialised countries like Sweden and Japan have not only longer life expectancies compared with less egalitarian societies like the United States, but they are also more likely to be successful in coping with further increases in life expectancy in the future.

Increases in health-care costs, and inequalities associated with them – in the US case, policy-makers are arguing that the rationing of health services to the elderly is inevitable – are not a direct or inevitable outcome of an ageing population, but of decisions by the government about how to administer the health system. If Australia follows the route suggested by the NCA – individualising the costs of health care to the elderly and withdrawing government involvement – then we will follow US trends, increasing inequality and getting less value for our health-care dollar, and will fall behind more state-centred systems such as Sweden and Japan.

The NCA's suggestion that there be more community responsibility for the elderly also overlooks the fact that there is already a huge community input into the informal care of elderly Australians with a disability. Of the elderly

with a severe or profound handicap, as defined by the ABS, 94 per cent were receiving informal care for self-care, mobility and communication. Around 75 per cent of those living in families received informal care only, while of those living alone, 85 per cent received care from informal networks. As the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare summarised the situation (1997:38):

The vast bulk of assistance required by older people with a profound or severe handicap was provided by the informal care network of family, friends and neighbours. For activities such as personal care, mobility, communications, meals, financial management and transport, over 80% of respondents reported that an informal carer was their main source of help. Between 73% and 74% reported a similar pattern with regard to home help and home maintenance, and even for health care 56% of respondents reported the informal care network rather than formal services as their main provider.

Within this sector, the aged are themselves major contributors. In 1997, of the total 1,727 million hours provided in household welfare services and voluntary service activities, the aged provided 11.7 per cent of the time spent on child-care services and 38.8 per cent of the time spent in voluntary community work (AIHW 1999b:31).

It is clear that the elderly are not sicker, nor are they inevitably going to increase health-care expenditure. However, let us assume that they are fuelling government policy, influenced by neo-liberal policies, which aims to make the elderly take more responsibility for themselves and to dissociate the government from the provision of services to them. As the experience in the United States shows, this will lead to more inequality and more sickness. The Australian data shows that the elderly already contribute enormously to their own self-care, and that women bear the burden of this care.

Theorising the medicalisation of women and their caring roles

Women's poor health, their participation at a lesser rate than men in the workforce, and their need to care for children and other adults in their environment are all deeply interlinked. The fact that they carry out the last of these roles disadvantages them on the labour market, and the fact that they fit in part-time work at low pay produces the sickness. In feminist theory the best account of the situation is one deriving from a mixture of the feminist analysis of patriarchy and the Marxist analyses of capitalism.

The original formulation (Zaretsky 1976) of **Marxist-feminism** draws on Engels's argument in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1948). Engels argued that the original division of labour is the family, and that

it is based on the existence of private property and of biology. Within the family, itself a form of private property based in monogamous marriage, and dependent on the 'free' labour of the wife, the husband was in an analogous position to the bourgeois and the wife to the proletariat. The control of women's reproductive capacity was central to the development of capitalism, in which the inheritance of property – under the law of primogeniture – had to be secured to the father's legitimate eldest-male offspring. In a capitalist society the owners of capital needed to ensure that they were passing their property onto their legitimate heirs, hence the rigid control of their wives' fertility. Thus the takeover of midwifery from the 1860s by male medical practitioners was central to the medicalisation of childbirth and the patriarchal control over women's reproductive capacities.

For more recent Marxist-feminism, the interface between patriarchy and capitalism shapes women's health, as well as the ways in which the caring and nurturing roles of women are constructed as natural (Benoit and Heitlinger 1998). Caring and femininity are presented as part and parcel of the biologically given nature of women, and medical constructions of women as weak and in need of constant surveillance reinforce these characteristics. Woman's role as a carer ensures in the first place that she is constructed as an unnoticed labourer in the private domain of the home, providing unpaid labour that reproduces her husband and children. This is done at no cost to capital, which benefits by exploiting the husband as worker in the present, and the children in the future. The emotional, physical and social organisation of the household and child-rearing (that is, caring) is defined in capitalist society as not labour and not work.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have demonstrated the complex ways inequality plays its way out on women's bodies, and the bodies of the disabled and the elderly. On the one hand, women's bodies are targeted by medicine as inherently sick and in need of constant surveillance, a process called medicalisation. This means that they are targeted for screening programs, participation in which adds to the impression that they are sick and vulnerable. At the same time, their caring and nurturing roles are sustained as natural and inevitable in models of women as mothers, and by extension as unpaid carers of the disabled and elderly.

We saw that to have a disabled body in contemporary Australia is to be excluded from work and education, while the elderly are actively being constructed as a group that is leeching on society. Their 'old' bodies are held to be sicker and costing the health and welfare sectors more. Contrary to major Australian reports, we demonstrated that the elderly are not sicker, and that health

and welfare expenditure on them has in fact decreased. Furthermore, we showed that the elderly participate in voluntary activities in the health and welfare sector, actively providing their own care, and being cared for by others in the community. Current government policies – which emphasise individualism and a retreat from centralised government delivery of services – will lead to a more costly system.

Overall, we have seen yet again how constructing bodies as natural entities, with inevitable differences that are not socially produced, justifies claims that inequality is natural and inevitable. Our argument is that bodies are constructed as different in the light of political, social, economic and gender criteria of participation and membership of society.

Key terms and concepts

- Medicalisation
- Gender
- Social marginalisation
- Social exclusion
- Hegemonic masculinity
- Social networks
- (Dis)ablism
- Marxist-feminism

Study questions

- 1 Why do women appear to be sicker than men?
- 2 Is the way the practice of masculinity is carried out in Australia bad for young men's health?
- 3 How and with what effect does medicine construct the bodies of women?
- 4 Who is providing the care in the informal sector?
- 5 Who benefits financially from the unpaid labour of looking after the disabled and the elderly?
- 6 Is an ageing population inevitably a sick one that will increase the cost of the health and welfare services sector?

Further reading

Barnes C., G. Mercer and T. Shakespeare. 1999. *Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

A comprehensive overview of how to think about disability from a sociological perspective.

Baxter J., D. Gibson and M. Lynch-Blosse. 1990. *Double Take: The Links between Unpaid and Paid Work*. Canberra: AGPS.

An Australian study showing how the unpaid labour of the home-worker underpins the functioning of the labour market.

Bittman, M., and J. Pixley. 1997. *The Double Life of the Family: Myth, Hope and Experience*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

An Australian study that shows, among other things, that women still carry out the bulk of domestic labour.

Connell, R.W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

A series of essays showing how the personal is political in the context of gender identity.

Part 2

**The Self, Society
and Understandings
of Inequality**

5 Experiencing the Inequality of Social Resources

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In part 2 we use ‘the **self**’ as a central, theoretical tool. This concept captures at a more micro level individuals’ experiences of the world; that is, their own understandings and accounts of social reality and their location in it. Similar terms, such as ‘**lived experience**’, attempt to do the same thing (see Metcalfe 1988:212; Thompson, E.P. 1981). Acknowledging the self in our approach to social inequality enables us to demonstrate that past explanations had less explanatory power than previously thought. In each of the chapters we demonstrate that the myth of the self – that is, the idea of who we are and, more to the point, the idea of who we want and expect to be – is free, autonomous and independent of social constraints. By drawing on different realms of empirical evidence, the following chapters demonstrate different explanatory insights into inequality. Further, they show how our understanding of inequality, using

what we have called a *holistic approach*, is enhanced by acknowledging the close analytical relationship between the sociological approaches to inequality (theory), the nature and extent of individuals' experiences of it (**self-experience**), and the evidence for its existence (empirical reality).

This chapter focuses on the self to provide a better understanding of the inequality of social resources in Australia. By '**social resources**', we mean those 'social goods' that have long been associated with the opportunity structure and the distribution of **life chances**; that is, principally income and wealth, but also family background, networks and education. In demonstrating the links between theory, self-experience and empirical reality, we show how a selection of early, middle and recent approaches to inequality in Australia reveal not so much the exclusion of individuals' self-experiences, but rather the lack of integration of this dimension with the nature of empirical reality in theory building. By our analysis of these past approaches, we demonstrate their limitations and the role self-experience has in understanding the *maintenance* of social inequality; that is, that the way individuals think of themselves is one part of the way inequality is maintained.

The nature and role of self-experience in approaches to social inequality

Before turning to a close examination of earlier works on inequality, it is important to give some precision to how we use the terms such as 'self-experience' and '**self-identity**' (see 'Clarifying the notion of the self', page 83).

In the following sections we provide a historical sketch of Australian landmark contributions that attempt to theorise inequality by incorporating, to varying extents, the role of the self and the domain of empirical reality.

Davies and Connell

The works of Davies (1967) and Connell (1977) are deliberate inclusions to reinforce the point that the passage of time is not necessarily associated with sociologists' increasing acknowledgement of the importance of individuals' experiences in explanations of inequality. In different ways, Davies and Connell give considerable emphasis to the role of individuals' definitions of the situation, especially in terms of individuals locating themselves within their own understandings of a wider **class** structure.

Davies's book *Images of Class* (1967) was based on 146 interviews in three Melbourne suburbs in 1962. His key point is that most people – '[p]ractically

Clarifying the notion of the self

Throughout this book, self-experience and a range of related terms, such as self-identity, the self and self-consciousness, are used as near synonyms. Notwithstanding this variety of terms, the common thread linking them is the idea of the self as a *social* accomplishment. Similar to the point made about the body (see part 1), this means that the notion of the self that we have is derived from or is dependent on a number of social factors. In other words, it does not exist outside of social relationships. Rather, it is influenced by participation of individuals in social relations, which means that an individual's

identity is established when others *place* him [*sic*] as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or *announces*. It is in the coincidence of placements and announcements that identity becomes a meaning of the self. [Stone, G. 1975:82; emphasis in original]

The social origins of various manifestations of the self is not a new idea and is evident in earlier work, such as Mead's (1934) concept of the 'me' and Cooley's (1964; originally published in 1902) 'looking glass self'. It is also found in other disciplines, such as psychology, although psychologists approach the concept somewhat uncritically. Even apparently subjective notions, such as an individual's view or lack of view of the self in relation to sexuality (Giddens 1992a), or 'narratives of the self', are not unique to that individual but are the product of social relations (Gergen and Gergen 1988:18; see also Rosenberg 1988:57). For example, the conscious awareness that one is 'homosexual' does not occur in a vacuum, but is contingent on social relationships, a point that will be discussed further in chapter 7. Finally, it is not surprising that we should adopt this view of the self because, to the extent that it is accessible to researchers, it is public in its 'announcements'. By contrast, individuals' private, subjective understandings of self, although socially influenced, are largely unknowable. Individuals' secrets, fantasies and the like, to the extent that they are totally private, are not the constituents of our notion of the self. The self and its variants in this book are related terms in that they are social in origin, public and, therefore, empirically accessible.

every adult' – have a 'class scheme', or an image of the hierarchical arrangement of people in Australian society. These schemes indirectly indicate the nature of individuals' experiences of inequality of various kinds. We say 'indirectly' because, although Davies (1967:1) acknowledges that we know little about factors shaping class schemes and that they are 'rarely fully thought out or consistent', class schemes are saying something about individuals' 'distinctive ways of dealing with unfairness, condescension, neglect, and feelings of unworthiness and envy, and of rationalising failure (or success)' (Davies 1967:3).

All of these facets of respondents' ways of dealing with perceived inequality are borne out in Davies's excerpts of the interview transcripts. As one retired schoolteacher, for instance, noted: 'I was not asked to my pupils' homes in Toorak. Quite rightly, as I couldn't mix on my income' (Davies 1967:37). What is especially important for our analysis is that their experiences of

inequality vary depending on their present and past social contexts, with the latter extending back to early childhood (Davies 1967:66). The particular strength of this insight is that it reinforces the role individual experience can play in maintaining patterns of inequality. To the extent that some subjects perceive no class structure and do not consciously experience negative aspects of inequality, they constitute a situation that reinforces the continuity of existing structural inequality.

Although Davies's *Images of Class* provides a detailed insight into individuals' experiences of various facets of inequality, it says nothing about the empirical reality behind those experiences. Further, without some grasp of subjects' everyday realities it is not possible to assess Davies's explanatory claim that images of class are related to social contexts, especially those extending back to early childhood. This observation is not so much a criticism of Davies's work, but more a support for our holistic approach to social inequality. To understand or explain the current picture of inequality in Australia, or the nature of inequality at any point in history for that matter, we need to have the nature of an individual's experience *and* the nature of the extent of inequality in which they are immersed; that is, their empirical reality. Without some idea of the nature of the prevailing patterns of social inequality, there is no way of assessing whether variation of individual experience is a result of some individuals' delusions. Further, and more telling, is the problem this absence poses for locating the role played by individuals' experiences in the maintenance of social inequality. Without some idea of the thing to be explained (the dependent variable), there is little utility in outlining the cause (the independent variable). These three interrelated aspects of our holistic approach are three points of the triangle we developed in the introduction. Their close relationship helps clarify what we mean when we stress the importance of capturing individuals' *lived* experiences in explaining inequality. In other words, to *explain* inequality one must have, alongside individuals' *experiences*, a picture of the *empirical reality* leading to those experiences.

Connell is another sociologist whose early work, *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture* (1977), provides a valuable precursor to our holistic approach to social inequality. The utility of Connell's work, unlike that of Davies, springs from his acknowledging the importance of explaining social inequality by relating individuals' experiences to their empirical reality. In brief, his explanation of social inequality derives 'from the socialist tradition of class analysis' (Connell 1977:6). Although by his own admission this 'collection of studies ... [is] not a comprehensive account of the class structure' (Connell 1977:ix), it is an early blueprint that demonstrates the importance of relating theory, experience and empirical reality.

Briefly, Connell's approach to explaining social inequality is as follows. There is an important distinction to be made between *categorical* and *genera-*

tive approaches to class as an explanatory variable. Categorical theory, as the name suggests, attempts to sort people into ordered layers or sections, such as bourgeoisie and proletariat, and to discover the factors shaping these categories. Research problems centre on identifying the consequences and correlates of this schema (Connell 1977:4). By contrast, generative theory, which Connell prefers, stresses

the way in which elementary structures and processes are seen to generate a huge and complex historical reality. The stress here is on the processes producing social groupings, rather than the categories they produce; and on the activity of people, not merely their location in social space. [Connell 1977:5]

Further, generative theory ‘is only validated by yielding an intelligible account of historical reality’ (Connell 1977:7).

Connell implicitly foreshadows the importance of, and relationships between, the key elements in our holistic approach. With a little licence, ‘the processes producing social groupings’ is akin to our claim that the maintenance of social inequality is a dynamic process that acknowledges ‘the activity of people’, such as their own individual experiences. Understanding social inequality must incorporate an ‘account of historical reality’, which, in our case, is a detailed account of the development of the empirical reality of inequality in contemporary Australia (see chapters 8, 9 and 10).

Elsewhere in his book, Connell also develops insights into the interrelationship between theory, the self and empirical reality. Like Davies, he argues that ‘class schemes’ are laid down in childhood, especially later childhood. Central to the child’s development of a class scheme is the link he or she makes between money and jobs (Connell 1977:135–51). The dynamic relationship between class and personal socialisation impinges on children at home but, more importantly, it is the school that tends to draw on ‘general features of middle class life’, such as ‘competitive individualism and their stress on respectable public behaviour’ (Connell 1977:185). Class background thus affects success at school and also the time spent there (Connell 1977:152–89). In short, Connell is portraying a picture of inequality of access to education that is at least partly maintained by class-based socialisation. This pattern of inequality in turn affects inequality of access to jobs and income, which are important issues to people because they figure strongly in their schemes of a hierarchical society.

Chamberlain and Western

Chamberlain’s *Class Consciousness in Australia* (1983) examines the nature and sources of individuals’ images of class. Based on interviews with 220

people in Melbourne, this study challenges populist understandings of Australia as a 'classless society', a 'land of equality and opportunity ... where the racial, political and class conflicts which divide many less fortunate societies are absent' (Chamberlain 1983:123). Instead, Chamberlain argues that although there is considerable diversity of class imagery, these images are closely linked to individuals' understandings of class as a source of inequality. Three theories are examined to explain the patterns of individuals' images of class – hegemonic theory, quasi-hegemonic theory and structural theory.

Hegemonic theory is the type proposed by Connell (1977). It argues that an individual's acceptance of their own inequality and the privilege of others is primarily the impact of a 'ruling culture'. It is the result of an 'artificially induced moral consensus, and the primary reason why there is not more class-based opposition' (Chamberlain 1983:ix). Quasi-hegemonic theory, on the other hand, argues that ruling ideas, and therefore, a ruling culture, have only partial penetration. Although

general principles and abstract assumptions in the ruling culture are effectively transmitted in the mass media, subordinate classes also have their direct experience and primary social contacts as alternative and conflicting sources of social imagery. [Chamberlain 1983:ix]

Structural theory, the approach Chamberlain favours, differs from those above because it denies the existence of a ruling culture and argues that the main sources of class imagery are individuals' own direct experiences and primary social contacts. These elements 'provide the ideational frameworks through which media messages are understood and interpreted'. He continues:

according to structural theory there is divergence (and not convergence) in class imagery, because different class positions give rise to different experiences and, therefore, to different imagery. [Chamberlain 1983:x, 126–7; see also the role of structure in chapter 2, this volume]

Although Chamberlain elevates the role of individuals' experiences of inequality and enters into detailed analysis of key theoretical concepts, what is missing, as in Davies's work, is an account of the empirical reality that constitutes individuals' direct experiences and primary social contacts. This gap, in turn, means that there is no systematic linking of the concepts with a supporting empirical domain. In a concluding comment on factors that 'undermine the potential for widespread class-based action' and 'reduce ... class tensions', Chamberlain hints at the nature of that empirical reality for at least a section of the population. He points to the role of 'relatively high living standards ... the divisions of the market place, and the possibility of upward social mobility'

(Chamberlain 1983:147) as key factors undermining a strong picture of class-based inequality.

Both Connell and Chamberlain point to Australians' high degree of tolerance of class-based inequality, and both give prominence to the importance of individuals' experiences in attempting to explain this inequality. Despite their different explanations, they, along with Davies, demonstrate that a fuller understanding of social inequality requires a detailed account of the nature of the empirical reality on a number of fronts associated with the distribution of key social resources.

A totally different approach to inequality from this same period is John Western's *Social Inequality in Australian Society* (1983). This work presents an immense amount of empirical material to demonstrate that, in terms of 'scarce and valued resources', namely 'health, education, welfare, housing, access to legal and political systems, [and] access to leisure', there are social inequalities that 'stem from seven major sources that can be empirically identified' (Western 1983:6). These sources are class, status, party, gender, race, ethnic origin and age.

Western (1983:6) suggests an explanatory approach by claiming that social inequality '*stems from* seven major sources' (emphasis added), as well as characterising these bases of inequality as 'seven *systems* of inequality' (emphasis in original). This theoretical or explanatory contribution, however, is more implicit than explicit. Despite claims indicative of theoretical finetuning – that is, that different systems dominate at different times; that individuals are differentially located in each of these systems and have differential access to scarce and valued resources; and that these systems are independent and interdependent (Western 1983:6) – the explanatory import is more embedded in the questions raised by the evidence than in the analysis of the evidence itself. Western himself indicates that his approach may be seen as 'crude empiricism' (Western 1983:7) and admits that the key factors responsible for social inequality 'do not derive from any overarching conceptual scheme in which each is logically located'. Instead, 'they have been empirically identified' and 'may be an embarrassment to the theoretician' (Western 1983:340). Although strong empirically, Western's explanatory approach is thus limited. There is no consideration of the role of individuals' experiences in maintaining inequality and, specifically, no theoretical insights that provide some explanation of process, such as Connell's generative approach to class. These limitations, we contend, are addressed in our holistic approach to inequality.

Implicitly, though, Western does raise worthwhile questions. In noting that there are relationships between the bases of inequality, he questions the nature

of these relationships and asks whether ‘certain of them can be ultimately subsumed under “higher order” groupings’. Specifically, he asks

to what extent are the effects of, say, race or ethnic origin a function of the fact that particular racial or ethnic groups are characteristically found within certain class groupings? [Western 1983:340]

These interactive effects that Western poses are taken up elsewhere. In discussing gender and social inequality, for instance, he spends some time clarifying the possible relationships between gender and class, namely: Is gender a condition for class? Are the effects of gender really the effects of underlying class divisions? And are there effects of gender independent of class? By answering ‘yes’ to the last question and ‘no’ to the others, Western’s response is clear. He not only explicitly indicates ‘[v]ery clearly’ that gender has independent effects, but also acknowledges the problem of trying to put empirical observations of gender into ‘a class “framework”’ (Western 1983:133). He sees scholars such as Bettina Cass as ‘creating confusion’ when they argue that ‘sex position refers to membership of a sex class’, which ‘is grounded in the relations of domestic production and the rearing of children’ (Western 1983:133–4).

The important question emerging from this discussion is whether Western’s “higher order” groupings’ do exist. In other words, is there interaction between the major sources of inequality, with some (possibly even one) exerting more effect than the others? Although we will return to this question, it is worth noting at this point that we cannot be so confident about the nature of the boundaries between concepts, such as Western’s seven sources of inequality. Arguably, even Western himself would advise caution in approaching the possible interactive and, more important, dominant effects from such sources. In relating the problems he had with the definition of concepts such as class, he asks:

when was social class ‘really’ social class and when was the writer actually describing status groups? ... Unless there were very good reasons for not doing so the assumption was made that it was ‘really’ class that the authors were talking about even though their definitions of the concept, at times were not tied as tightly as one might have wished to the system of production. However, the pragmatics of the situation are, that whether one starts out from a neo-Marxist perspective as Connell does, or a stratification perspective as Frank Jones would do, individuals get allocated to very similar positions of relative advantage ... Connell’s working class person and Jones’s low socio-economic status person are in 99 cases out of 100 the same, and confronted with the same problems of access to scarce and valued resources. [Western 1983:129]

Western is quoted at length because he documents the existence of conceptual unclarity and the ease with which one can easily assume that such conceptual schemes have more independence than is warranted. He also demonstrates

that issues related to inequality can so often centre on debates between conceptual schemes rather than seeking arbitration by focusing on the nature of the link between those schemes and the empirical reality in which individuals are immersed, and their responses to or experiences of it. In other words, the seeking of arbitration is to acknowledge the value of our holistic approach in the attempt to understand inequality.

McGregor and Peel

A recent work on inequality in Australia that attempts to integrate theory, individual experience and empirical reality is Craig McGregor's *Class in Australia* (1997). Based on 'academic research and personal experience' (McGregor, C. 1997:vii), this book focuses on the class structure and how it is responsible for shaping structured social inequality in Australia.

The explanatory role of class is made clear from the start, where he claims:

It is impossible to understand Australia or the lives Australians live without reference to class ... It is impossible to live in Australia without coming to realise that the different social classes have different sorts of jobs, live in different suburbs, go to different schools, get different incomes, speak in different ways, experience crucial differences in privilege and inequality, indeed *live different lives*. [McGregor, C. 1997:2–3; emphasis in original]

Further, class's explanatory role can be independent of individuals' consciousness of it. Although McGregor notes that 'Australians are conscious of class' (1997:14), he acknowledges that it 'may well be that many Australians gain their primary self-identification from their gender or their ethnicity' (1997:17). He reinforces the point by claiming that

class is not just about self-identity ... it is about *inequality* ... And even if you are not personally aware of class, what happens in your life can be, and usually is, radically affected by it. [McGregor, C. 1997:17; emphasis in original]

In addition to his focus on the explanatory role of class and individuals' experiences of it and its effects, McGregor presents a considerable amount of quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide a picture of the nature and extent of the empirical reality of social inequality in Australia.

Although McGregor outwardly appears to integrate sociological theory, individual experience and empirical reality, there are two problems with his approach. The first concerns McGregor's understanding of class. It is not clear, amid conflicting statements, whether class *consists of*, is *determined by*, or *determines* other social attributes. This confusion is evident in his claim that

‘factors such as income, education, occupation and parentage are in fact components of class: they help determine people’s class position, and are also deeply influenced by class’ (McGregor, C. 1997:17). Although, technically, it appears that McGregor is referring to income, education, and so on, as the content of the definition or the defining predicates of class, his confusion obscures exploration of key questions such as: How is social inequality maintained?

Concerning this question, we noted earlier that a distinction must be made between the original causes of social inequality and the factors currently maintaining it. In fact, it was our stress on the role of the latter in the overall explanation of inequality that warrants our inclusion of individuals’ experiences of it in our holistic approach. It is noteworthy that although McGregor considers the existence of individuals’ consciousness of class, he does not utilise this dimension by systematically assessing its role in maintaining class-based inequality. If anything, there is confusion. On the one hand, there is obvious class-based inequality in Australia. On the other hand, the most dominant pattern of **class-consciousness** is one of middle-classness, with half the population falling into this category. There is no relating of these domains, save the comment that, ‘Among middle Australians, only 7 per cent think they get “a raw deal out of life”’ (McGregor, C. 1997:173). In short, McGregor fails to link his theoretical domain (class) with individual experience (class-consciousness).

The second problem in McGregor’s overall approach is that he does not go far enough with his critical analysis of class. Arguably, this is partly a result of the confusion outlined above, in that class is defined in terms of inequality, which in turn acts back to shape class. It is this type of confusion that Connell views as a problem of the categorical approach to class. Specifically, the reason for pursuing this problem is that McGregor, like Western, goes through the exercise of examining whether different theoretical approaches refer to a common category of people. Western, for instance, notes that ‘Connell’s working class person and Jones’s low socio-economic status person are in 99 cases out of 100 the same, and confronted with the same problems of access to scarce and valued resources’ (Western 1983:129). Similarly, McGregor (1997:25) recognises that occupation ‘figures as a key determinant in almost all contemporary class schemes, Marxist and non-Marxist’. He then goes on to show how Baxter, Emmison and Western, in their *Class Analysis and Contemporary Australia* (1991), demonstrate that a neo-Marxist approach based on the work of Erik Olin Wright and Goldthorpe’s Weberian approach ends up ‘by producing remarkably similar class breakdowns’ (McGregor, C. 1997:27). Although McGregor claims to adopt a synthesis of the Weberian and Marxist approaches to class, he does not confront the question of what it is in the experience of people in the same ‘class breakdown’ that could inform the conceptual refinement of the concept of class. In this case, McGregor, again, does not link his theoretical domain (class) with the importance of that common occupational

location (empirical reality). This gap in McGregor's work is not idiosyncratic, but occurs also in the second, more recent work on inequality.

The last work in this selection of insights into social inequality is Mark Peel's *Good Times, Hard Times: The Past and the Future in Elizabeth* (1995). This book is distinctive because it presents a rich insight into the realm of individual experience in attempting to provide some explanation for the development of circumstances encompassing Elizabeth and its citizens between the 1960s and 1990s. Having grown up in Elizabeth, a 1950s 'new town' north of Adelaide, Peel has a vantage point that enables him to gain perceptive insights into the nature of the town's inequality. The strengths of Peel's research are that, as an 'insider', he is able to capture individuals' lived experiences of Elizabeth and to collect a considerable body of empirical evidence. Concerning the former, Peel's insights are often profound and numerous. Capturing an insight on women in Elizabeth that, arguably, would have escaped an 'outsider', he notes that 'women's roles were not secondary because they were centred on the home and the neighbourhood' and goes on to suggest:

Of course, women's power at home was always contingent on men's acceptance of that role, and working-class women are quick to offer wry assessments of the limits of 'their place'. But the households where men ruled while women and children suffered were examples of failure, not success. It is a cruel common sense indeed which mistakes deviant behaviour for an accepted working class practice. [Peel 1995:127]

Reinforcing this view, Peel adds to what is arguably a counterpredictive view of women in Elizabeth by capturing facets of their everyday experience. In terms of who had power and responsibility over money matters, Peel notes that

many Elizabeth marriages ... copied the accepted pattern of substantial and sometimes total female responsibility for the management of family money and family time. In some cases men gave all of their wages to their wives and received a weekly allowance ... These decisions depended on personality and tradition, as well as relative earning power ... Some couples, including my parents, established joint money management from the beginning. Even then, the source of all money was the housekeeping *purse*, which sat, untouched by any person bar my mother, on the kitchen table, the centre of family existence. As a child, I knew my father *earned* money. But only my mother seemed to *use* it. [Peel 1995:128; emphasis in original; see also Charlesworth 2000]

Elsewhere, in the school setting, he captures another facet of individuals' lived experiences when noting:

A fundamental part of the educational bargain for working-class children, after all, is that they must change, become something different and better. The overt and covert curricula of the primary and high schools ... offer students a specific and class-based definition of the 'educated person' which they can reject or take

up but rarely shape. The school urges working-class children to become what they are not and cannot be without inventing themselves as something very different. They must accept lessons about work, private and public life and personal identity which are often hostile to those they experience and learn at home. [Peel 1995:149]

Given that Peel's aim, as a historian, was to 'explain how Elizabeth was structured by the different people who planned it, inhabited it and used it' (Peel 1995:154), there is a wealth of empirical evidence and abundant statistics, alongside the informed accounts of residents' lived experiences. What is missing for the sociologist, though, is a detailed explanation or sociological theory that accounts for, and is integrated with, the structured disadvantage of the town and its inhabitants, especially its women. It is clear, though, from Peel's brief expression of theoretical sympathies that, were such a detailed theory to exist, it would entail some amalgam of gender and class. He notes in relation to 'gender disadvantage and inequality', for example, that

the women I know ... stress the links between gender and class: that in Elizabeth, women and men are oppressed together because of who they are, while women's fortunes are narrowed further by the burdens of being female. [Peel 1995:133]

Gender and class, however, are used more as sensitising concepts than as facets of a more systematic theory. Accordingly, social inequality in Elizabeth is demonstrated with evidence and conveyed as lived experience, but it is not explained in any detailed and systematic manner.

By way of summary, this analysis of our select list of different works on social inequality emphasises two key insights that are crucial for the approach we adopt. First, our stressing the importance of the three dimensions of sociological theory, individual experience and empirical reality is reinforced by the attention they separately have received over the past few decades in sociological literature on social inequality. As figure 5.1 demonstrates, all three dimensions have a prominent role in our six works, although not all works cover all dimensions. Second, with the exception of Connell, whose contribution is brief, these three dimensions have not been systematically integrated in any of the selected works. Concerning this process of integration, the following sections open up the nature of the empirical realm surrounding social inequality by examining the notion of 'life chances' and the evidence of inequality of social resources in associated domains.

The place of life chances in approaching inequality

Most societies have some shared understanding of the notion of 'life chances'. It may not be referred to by this name and it may not necessarily occur at a con-

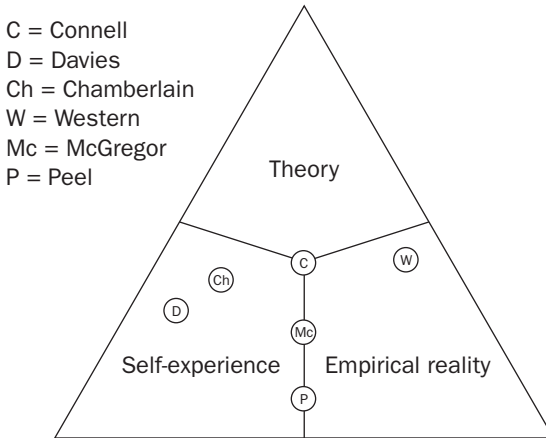


Figure 5.1 Location of the six authors in relation to the elements of the holistic model

scious level. What is shared is the assumption that there are desirable and undesirable events that impinge on individuals' lives. What is less shared are the particular events in any given society and at any moment in history that are ranked on the desirable to undesirable scale. Gerth and Mills capture something of the nature of life chances in contemporary western industrialised societies. Life chances cover

the chance to stay alive during the first year after birth to the chance to view fine arts, the chance to remain healthy and grow tall, and if sick to grow well again quickly, the chance to avoid becoming a juvenile delinquent and, very crucially, the chance to complete an intermediary or higher educational grade. [Gerth and Mills 1954:313]

This brief comment broadly corresponds with the picture of life chances that is held by people in Australia. The valuing of and the capacity to maintain health, to achieve an education, and to avoid threats to life and being caught up with the law are widely shared, as is the valuing of educational achievement. Although individuals are generally aware of life chances and their benefits, what is less widely acknowledged is the structured inequality involving these life chances and, even more so, the main factors accounting for this inequality. It is worth paying some attention to both these areas.

Social inequality and life chances

In Australia, as in most contemporary societies, there is structured inequality of life chances. This picture is not widely acknowledged by individuals for a variety of reasons. As we have already noted, those who are disadvantaged

often do not see themselves as such to the extent of politically mobilising on this issue. This situation exists for a number of reasons. Corporate groups who own media outlets in Australia have not viewed it in their interests to champion others' interests, especially where it involves challenging governments to engage in redistribution of key resources, such as wealth and income. An indirect illustration of this claim was Kerry Packer's reaction to the proposed Independent and Multicultural Broadcasting Corporation (IMBC) legislation in 1980. As chairman and managing director of Australian Consolidated Press, Packer (quoted in Bostock 1984:107) stated:

Ethnic TV, in the long run for Australia, is one of the worst things I've ever heard of in my life. It is divisive to our society – and the last thing we want is a society divided on an ethnic basis. It is nonsense.

Concerning the IMBC, he added that it was 'an outrageous waste of money ... It's meaningless, quite useless, and won't get much of an audience' (quoted in Bostock 1984:107)

The potential audience was the point. Without attributing motives to Mr Packer, it is the case that he did not pressure the Federal Government on behalf of Australia's non-English-speaking population to use taxpayers' money to establish a rival, ethnic broadcasting network. Arguably, this was because they would have competed with commercial media outlets for audience share, which was, for the latter, a key measure of profits.

Further, there is the Australian myth of equality and classlessness (see chapter 8). Governments and the media perpetuate this myth by what they do not say. Apposite for our purpose, for example, is the absence of any detailed media discussion or analysis of social inequality. Instead, prominence is given to the issue of poverty, especially claims by individuals, such as Peter Saunders of the Centre for Independent Studies, that the poor today are relatively better off than previously (see Smith Family 2002). Arguably, to the extent that the myth is not challenged or made a political issue, structured inequality is more likely to be seen as a victim's problem rather than something that forms part of a wider social structure. Certain categories of the unemployed, Aborigines and the very poor are cases in point.

Structured social inequality exists, especially in those areas that affect life chances, such as income, work, education, health and involvement with the law. Key areas of the realities of these inequalities are outlined above and below, but a few specific examples capture the general picture. Starting with Aboriginal people, the infant mortality rate is more than twice that for the non-indigenous population. Within the past decade, 5 per cent of the indigenous population had had no education at all, compared to 1 per cent of the remain-

der of the population (see de Looper and Bhatia 2001; Graetz and McAllister 1994:116–38). The situation of manual workers in Australia also reveals a pattern of structural disadvantage in terms of life chances. As part 1 demonstrates, manual workers compared to non-manual workers die younger; are more likely to have poor health; are more likely to be involved in work-related accidents; and are more likely to be involved with the law.

These comments are sustained in other areas of life chances. In higher education, the proportion of people with tertiary qualifications in the eastern suburbs of Sydney is triple that in the western suburbs, where there is a higher concentration of manual workers (Macken 2000:3–4). In terms of income, manual workers have dropped further behind. In the past decade, ‘income in the top 5 per cent of neighbourhoods [ranked in terms of each neighbourhood’s total income] has risen 23 per cent while those in the bottom 5 per cent have dropped 23 per cent’ (Macken 2000:3; see also chapter 9, this volume).

The purpose of these brief examples of differing life chances is to provide some illustration of what structured inequality looks like, but also to stress the point that in Australia the types of social inequality that have attracted the attention of sociologists have largely been those that affect life chances. Put another way, although not generally acknowledged in the wider population, there is little disagreement among sociologists as to the areas of inequality that most involve life chances. Western (1983:6), for instance, links the notion of inequality and life chances in his listing of ‘scarce and valued resources’. Despite his writing on this topic almost two decades ago, his key areas include work, health, education, welfare, housing, access to the legal and political systems, and access to leisure. Today, we would not take issue with the claim that these areas are closely related to life chances. In terms of the relationship between inequality and life chances, it is not the case that social inequality *affects* life chances unequally: the latter *is* social inequality. We will now turn our attention to a more detailed picture of the empirical reality of social inequality.

The empirical picture of social inequality

The evidence presented below is selective. It is not categorised under headings such as ‘wealth’ and ‘income’ but, instead, these more familiar dimensions of inequality are dealt with in terms of changing patterns and/or new areas of inequality that are consistent with our holistic approach. We will deal with these developments, focusing particularly on the related areas of ‘**middle Australia**’, poverty and the world of work.

The changing face of middle Australia

In recent years academics have used the notion of middle Australia to characterise middle-income earners. Increasingly, analysts have pointed to the negative impact of social change on the middle class with expressions such as 'the suffering middle' (Harding 1997; see also McGregor, C. 1997:167). Research conducted by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) at the University of Canberra demonstrates that middle-income earners, defined as those who earn between 75 per cent and 125 per cent of median earnings, have not only become less numerous, but also have suffered relatively in terms of share of income. Between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, the top 10 per cent of income earners had a 12 per cent increase in income and the bottom 10 per cent had a 15 per cent increase. By contrast, the middle experienced an increase of 5 per cent. When translated into dollars, the rise at the top was worth \$190 a week and that at the bottom \$55. The smaller increase for the middle represented a rise of \$30 (Megalogenis 2000a:2; see also chapter 10, this volume).

Most of the decline of middle-income earners was among men. In the early 1980s, 51.2 per cent of all men in full-time work were middle-income earners. By 1996–97 this proportion dropped to 44.4 per cent. The picture for women was less dramatic. Although they experienced a drop of middle-income earnings from 58.3 per cent to 51.7 per cent, most of these women increased their incomes during this period. By contrast, among the men a half 'went backwards, to battler status, on less than 75 per cent of the median; the other half were catapulted to high incomes, on more than 150 per cent of the median' (Megalogenis 2000a:2; see also Long 2000; Macken 2000).

There are two important and related aspects of this change. The first is that the income gap is not only widening, but is closely tied to wealth inequality, which is growing at an even faster rate (Steketee et al. 2000:1; see tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). The relationship is evident in the fact that income derives from, or eventually derives from, investments, which in turn contributes to the wider picture of social inequality. This is evident in that the top 10 per cent of income earners between 1982 and 1996–97 increased their share of investment income from 39 per cent to 49 per cent (Kelly, P. 2000:2). The second aspect is that this change in empirical reality, involving shifts in income and wealth, for example, corresponds to a shift in consciousness or self-experience among the individuals affected.

Accompanying these structural changes in income and wealth is evidence of widespread feelings of dissatisfaction among Australians. A Newspoll survey commissioned by the *Australian* in 2000 points to a nation 'that is more prosperous but in many ways less happy' and inclined to 'deep disaffection towards

Table 5.1 Wealth

Year	Share of total wealth (%)			
	Top 1%	Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 20%
1915	37.8	64.2	78.1	89.1
1966–68	9	25	26	54
1967–72	22	45.5	58.5	72
1969	19.7	41	55.2	72
1978	22	46	60	
1984	25	50	50	
	Bottom 20%	Bottom 35%	Bottom 50%	
1915				2
1966–68	1	6		8
1967–72				7.9
1969				0.4
1978		8		
1985 ^a				10
1990 ^a				5

^a Household incomes.

Sources: Piggott 1988; Western 1983; McGregor, C. 1997; van Krieken et al. 2000; Megalogenis 2000b; Way 1997.

Table 5.2 Income

Year	Share of total income (%)			
	Top 20%	Top 10%	Top 1%	Bottom 40%
1942–43	45.48		31.23	15
1968	38.8			20
1981–82	42.25		25.72	15.3
1985–86	43.64		27.12	14.64
1981–82 ^a	44	25.7		
1989–90	43.99	24	28.07	15
1989–90 ^a	47	28.1		
1994 ^a		50		

^a Household incomes.

Sources: Piggott 1988; Western 1983; McGregor, C. 1997; van Krieken et al. 2000; Megalogenis 2000b; Way 1997.

Table 5.3 Distribution of private wealth in Australia, 1996

% of population	N	Wealth (\$ millions)	% of Australia's total wealth
1	190,000	431,000	16
9	1,700,000	647,000	24
39	7,400,000	960,000	36
20	3,700,000	108,000	4
30	5,600,000	nil	0
99	18,590,000		80 ^a

^a Presumably, the remaining 20 per cent of private wealth was in the hands of overseas persons.

Source: Based on Aarons 1999:16.

governments' (Steketee 2000:1). More specifically, the survey revealed that 91 per cent of respondents thought that there was more stress and pressure in people's lives; more than two-thirds saw a reduction in time to spend with family and friends; almost 80 per cent thought that workers were less secure in their jobs compared to the past; and almost two-thirds of people over 50 thought that the distribution of wealth was less fair than ten years previously (Steketee 2000:2). For many, 'living standards have improved ... yet they feel poorer' (Megalogenis 2000a:1). This point is consistent with a problem embedded in the dispute between the Smith Family and the Centre for Independent Studies over the appropriate measures of poverty. What the Smith Family was trying to convey in its report *Financial Disadvantage in Australia 1999 to 2000: The Persistence of Poverty in a Decade of Growth* (Harding, Lloyd and Greenwell 2001), was that 'the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" has widened' (Smith Family 2002:3; emphasis added). Although the report chose a relative measure of poverty – half the average income of all Australians, \$416 a week for a family with two children – the measure of poverty was not the main issue:

The core issue [was] not just about how many possessions a person's income can buy or how much food one can put on the table but rather how well that person can take part in society based on such an income. [Smith Family 2002:3]

The problem was that the Smith Family was identifying the fact of *increasing* social inequality – a process – whereas the Centre for Independent Studies was taking a snapshot at one particular moment to obtain a *measure* of poverty, which was used to claim that the Smith Family report exaggerated the number of Australians living in poverty. But poverty and increasing social inequality are not the same thing.

The focus of this dissatisfaction among Australians is 'middle Australia'. Paul Kelly, commenting on the *Australian's* surveys, concludes that the

results confirm the financial foundations of the 1990s political culture – a battler middle class pre-occupied by relative rather than absolute income gains, resentful both of the high flyers and the rising poor. The middle class is being stretched, financially and psychologically. [Kelly, P. 2000:1; see also chapter 10, this volume]

This experiential picture is corroborated by other researchers in this area. Professor Michael Pusey, who is completing a major study on middle Australia, claims that those in ‘the centre of the income stream’ are more likely to view their incomes as low (quoted in Gunn 2000d:3). NATSEM director Professor Ann Harding notes:

Middle Australian families feel worse off because they are sandwiched between affluent two-income professional couples ... and unemployed and **working poor** families who receive more help from the government than they do. [quoted in Gunn 2000d:3]

There is empirical support for this perception. NATSEM research shows there was a 30 per cent rise in average income for the bottom 10 per cent of income earners in the period between 1982 and 1997, an increase partly attributable to lower unemployment rates, but also to government assistance that was not available in the 1980s (Rintoul 2000:2; see also chapter 10, this volume). This same research has demonstrated that these developments have led to structural change in terms of the composition of the bottom 10 per cent of income earners over this period. Social-welfare-dependent families have been replaced by the ‘working poor’ at the bottom of the opportunity structure (McGregor, A. 2000:3).

This changing picture of the distribution of income and wealth, accompanied by identifiable patterns of individual experience among those who see themselves as most affected, implicates poverty and the world of work, and provides new insights into inequality. Put differently, in terms of our holistic approach, this changed *empirical reality* involving wealth, income, poverty and work, in conjunction with new patterns of individuals’ *self-experiences*, leads to a new *theoretical approach* or understanding of inequality.

Poverty and the world of work

The notion of ‘the working poor’ is a recent phenomenon. Although it has been, and still is, the case that the most disadvantaged in Australian society are single parents, who are mainly women, unemployed youth, sections of the elderly and Aborigines (Way 1997:57), the important development is the close proximity of these categories to the working poor. It is this proximity that reinforces the

latter's feelings of resentment. As Saunders notes: 'While social security recipients hardly live in the lap of luxury, the income gap has become so narrow compared with those earning low incomes that it generates enmity' (quoted in Way 1997:58). This claim has some empirical support from NATSEM's 'A portrait of child poverty in 1995–96' (Harding and Szukalska 1998). The four key reasons for poverty among children, according to Harding, one of the report's authors, include that 'the head of their family was either unemployed or a sole parent; one or both their parents was self-employed, or their parents belonged to the working poor' (*Canberra Times* 1998:5).

In the light of the changing composition of those in poverty, specifically the reduction of the proportion of the elderly and a rise of the proportion of 'the working poor', it is not surprising that the working poor have insecure, casual jobs that are accompanied by feelings of underemployment (Schwartz 2001:12). The fact that these people have severely compromised life chances, in that they do not have enough resources to cover 'basics: food, shelter, education and health' (Way 1997:57; see also Birrell and Rapson 1997), means a closer look at changes in the world of work is warranted.

The comments above concerning middle Australia indicate that many Australians have moved up and down the income scale over the past fifteen years. These movements have been moderated by at least two major factors: changes in the areas of work, and the nature of qualifications of those seeking employment. Areas such as communications, marketing and advertising, and the community-services sector have opened up upper-income opportunities for those with the appropriate formal qualifications (see Macdonald 1997:2; see also chapter 10, this volume). It is into these areas that more women are moving from middle-income brackets. At the same time, other women are falling behind in income and stability of employment, especially those in low-skilled areas such as the textile industry and domestic work (Gunn 2000b:2; Gunn 2000a:1–2; Macfarlane 2000:2). On the other hand, as noted earlier, men have moved up and down in terms of income. It is the downward movement that prompts a closer look at wider structural change in the world of work.

Commentators have characterised this upward and downward movement in the world of work as a 'work revolution'. Stephen Long, writing for the *Australian Financial Review*, claims that 'Australia's workforce is divided; between the overworked and the out-of-work; between the well-paid and the poorly paid; between career jobs and fringe jobs' (Long 2000:7). This division has resulted from global competition and a consequent reduction in the size of the core of full-time jobs. Long elaborates on the nature of this structural change. Today, in an environment of higher unemployment rates, workers are entering the workforce later and leaving earlier. They are working longer hours, have low levels of job security or permanency, and those who work standard hours (that is,

thirty-eight hours over five days) represent only one-third of the workforce. At the same time, there has been an increase in the proportion of casual and contract work. People with two or more jobs are 5 per cent of the workforce, with part-time workers in general constituting 25 per cent of the workforce compared to 10 per cent in the late 1960s. Taken-for-granted assumptions of the idea of working from school-leaving age to retirement have vanished. From the late 1960s to the present, the proportion of male workers aged 15 to 19 in full-time work has fallen from 59 per cent to 18 per cent. A similar pattern holds for males aged between 60 and 65, who in the same period have dropped from 80 per cent in work to 42 per cent today (Long 2000:7–8; see also chapter 10, this volume, for a discussion of the wider processes that attempt to explain the developments above).

A further point is that structured unemployment resulting from the changes described above does not necessarily implicate low-wage, low-skill workers. In fact, there is some growth of employment for these workers, as there is a falling of employment for workers in high-wage, high-skill industries. At the same time, though, the proportions of the total workforce these workers represent have changed. From the late 1960s to the present, the proportion of professional workers has risen from 11 per cent to 28 per cent. Over the same period, the proportion of semiskilled and manual workers and labourers combined has declined from almost a third of the workforce to 19 per cent (ABS 1989, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1998). It is perhaps to be expected that in the light of these structural changes there is some uncertainty and anxiety in the wider community about the role of education in contemporary Australia (see, for example, Gunn 2000c). The latter is a result of the increasing realisation in Australia that the only way into the highest-paying jobs is through educational qualifications. Obtaining the latter is not very straightforward because of educational expenses. More telling, though, is the proportional decrease in very-high-income earners among an expanding professional sector. This means that, in terms of reaching the highest income levels, having educational qualifications is now a necessary but not a sufficient condition.

It is this wider picture of structural change that demonstrates that the recent response by the Centre for Independent Studies to the Smith Family–NATSEM report *Financial Disadvantage in Australia 1999 to 2000* (Harding, Lloyd and Greenwell 2001) concerning the measurement of poverty was really a red herring. The response contributed little to the understanding of inequality, because poverty and inequality are not the same thing. In terms of understanding inequality, it matters little whether the poorest individuals in our society are relatively better off than their counterparts in previous decades, or whether one in eight or one in twelve is living in poverty. What matters are the factors that push the poor into the lowest strata of income, wealth and opportunity and

increasingly ensure that they can do little about it. Drawing on our holistic approach, one of these factors is the extent to which the poor's lived experiences are characterised by resignation and the absence of political activism centred on the likelihood of changing the distribution of social resources. The most poor are the least vocal about their position compared to middle Australia. The latter have been considerably more vocal in expressing their displeasure over their changing and deteriorating life chances.

Theorising social inequality and life chances

In this section we want to bring together the three themes, theorising inequality, personal experience and empirical reality. To reiterate, these themes represent three points of a triangle, which means that they need to be seen as a whole in order to gain a fuller understanding of social inequality. Focusing largely on one theme limits this understanding. We saw earlier, for instance, the intractable theoretical differences in the neo-Marxist and stratificationist approaches to inequality, represented by the works of Bob Connell and Frank Jones. Also, we noted the Marxist and Weberian approaches to class, represented in the works of Erik Olin Wright and John Goldthorpe. Unless one turns to the other points of our triangle – personal experience and the empirical reality – there is no way to resolve the debate embedded in these different theoretical contributions. We also noted that other scholars, such as Davies (1967) and Western (1983), each largely stressed one point of the triangle, namely personal experience and empirical reality respectively.

We can begin to link our themes by reiterating a claim we made earlier; that is, it is not so much the existence of social inequality of social resources that we need to explain, but the maintenance of that inequality. As we noted, where individuals have no particular experience of their relative material disadvantage, it is not difficult to see that this lack of consciousness of inequality goes a long way to explaining its continuity. That experience is important, for such maintenance is reinforced by looking at the contrasting situation of those who gain most from the distribution of wealth and income. It is difficult to imagine the wealthy having no thoughts or experiences of their situation. On the contrary, it is more reasonable to suppose that it is precisely because of their focus on and concern for their situation that they are able to maintain it. Aarons (1999:79) captures something of this point when he says:

The rich are growing in number, wealth and power ... [and] [a]ctually believe they are superior by reason of their intelligent genes, helped along by their superior and affluent parents, most sent to exclusive schools, demanding superior goods and services by right of ancestry, brains – and money.

We would contend, therefore, that the experience of inequality is an important condition of individuals attempting to change their situation. This point is important because, although there has been a long history of inequality of wealth and income in Australia, the disenchantment of middle Australia over their declining situation, characterised by a strong negative perception of their lived experience, is relatively recent.

Drawing on this situation represented by middle Australia provides the link between empirical reality, personal experience and sociological theory. Specifically, we need to examine the experience of middle Australia in the context of the wider empirical reality, and then see the extent of the links with previous, albeit diverse, theoretical attempts to explain inequality. Put differently, what does the current situation of middle Australia have in common with previous theoretical insights on inequality in this country?

It seems that the answer to this question is reasonably straightforward. If we return for the moment to the theoretical differences mentioned earlier between Connell and Jones, and Wright and Goldthorpe, the important common ground is that all are referring to the same category of individuals. In other words, whether the explanation of inequality centres on prestige hierarchies or class differences, or whether the basis of class is Marxist or Weberian, the same category of individuals emerge on top. We suggest there are three abiding, common elements that characterise the most advantaged category of individuals in these works. They can be compressed into one clause: there is a *history* of their *having* and *controlling* money. Convincing evidence for this claim would entail more material than we can muster in this chapter. We would point out, however, that we are talking about the same category of individuals in recent history; that is, the period covered by the work of Connell, Jones, Wright and Goldthorpe. Further, we would add that the most advantaged individuals in Australia are not, and have not been, individuals in isolation but members of successful families with a history of wealth and capital accumulation. Regardless of the different theoretical stances, these are the important characteristics of those who are the most materially advantaged and who are the same individuals in each case. At the same time, the perception of challenge to these defining elements is the domain of themes of the reality and experience of middle Australia. Focusing on the fortunes of middle Australia, it is clear that their experience of their declining control over their critical material resources, mainly money, has consequences that go beyond new developments of interest to academics. We say 'mainly money' because this resource touches other important resources, such as education, which in turn is critical in terms of level of employment. Some indication of the relationship of these resources and their continuity can be gleaned from the claim that the most advantaged – millionaires – spend on education seven times more per capita than the rest of the population (Murrill 2000:20).

Conclusion

Given this chapter's concern with social resources, especially wealth and income and their impact on life chances, it is not surprising that this domain of material inequality should have been the focus of previous research. We have attempted to address the limitations of that work by employing our 'holistic approach', which links theory, self-experience and empirical reality. Our insights, together with a wide range of empirical evidence covering areas such as the world of work, poverty and middle Australia, identify how patterns of self-experience aid in understanding the *maintenance* of social inequality. At the same time, though, the relatively recent discontent among middle Australia demonstrates how altered patterns of self-experience can be a spur to change. What may have been self-experience characterised by acceptance has turned to resentment, frustration and political activism. The rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party is a facet of this wider development and, notwithstanding its lack of success in gaining entry to state and Federal parliaments, is a force for change with which all major parties have had to reckon. However, material inequality, albeit important, is but one dimension in the wider milieu of transformations of inequality. The following chapters identify other dimensions and their particular roles in understanding inequality.

Key terms and concepts

- Self
- Lived experience
- Self-experience
- Social resources
- Life chances
- Self-identity
- Class
- Class-consciousness
- Middle Australia
- Working poor

Study questions

- 1 Why is the self-experience of individuals important in understanding social inequality?
- 2 What are 'life chances' and why do they have prominence in discussions of inequality?
- 3 What is the difference between poverty and social inequality?
- 4 What is 'middle Australia' and why is it of interest to social scientists?

Further reading

Chamberlain, Chris. 1983. *Class Consciousness in Australia*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin.

Although not focusing on the micro level of particular individuals, this book presents a valuable insight into the patterns of individuals' consciousness of class, which emphasises the importance of the explanatory role of self-experience. It also provides a range of theoretical frameworks that could be employed to account for these patterns.

Connell, R.W. 1977. *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This early work presents an insight into the dynamic aspects of class formation and maintenance; the manifestations of class as a process at the everyday level of individuals' lived experiences; and the role individuals' consciousness of class and inequality plays in the maintenance of their empirical realities.

Davies, A.F. 1967. *Images of Class: An Australian Study*. Sydney: Sydney University Press.

A valuable early Australian work that analyses empirical material related to individuals' lived experiences, particularly the nature of their own self-identities. Unfortunately, there is little or no empirical evidence of the nature of those individuals' immediate social environments to compare and contrast with patterns of self-experience.

Hiller, Peter (ed.). 1981. *Class and Inequality in Australia*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

This book presents another range of insights from a sociologist who has consistently stressed the importance of including individuals' self-experiences in theorising the concept of class.

McGregor, Craig. 1997. *Class in Australia*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books.

A readable, more popular account of material inequality in Australia. Although there is considerable empirical material to support claims of increasing social inequality, the theoretical insights are more generalisations than an extension of the evidence provided.

Western, John S. 1983. *Social Inequality in Australian Society*. Melbourne: Macmillan.

This repository of empirical material on inequality in Australia focuses on the usual areas of class, gender, Aborigines, ethnicity and age. It raises important questions concerning the theoretical issues surrounding inequality but does not pursue the explanatory path.

6 Experiencing the Inequality of Cultural Difference

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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This chapter turns to inequality as it relates to cultural difference and **self-identity**. In focusing on individuals' memberships of particular categories and groups, its approach is less broad than the previous chapter, where we discussed individuals' experiences of inequality in terms of more encompassing entities, such as middle Australia and people involved in the world of work and poverty. The title of this chapter, however, is more complex than it might appear, for it refers not only to the actual relationships between **cultural difference**, identity, and inequality, but also to mistaken assumptions and understandings of these areas and their relations (see also chapters 8, 9 and 10).

Our examination of the links between sociological theory, self-experience and empirical reality in this chapter is mainly concerned with developments in **migrant** and Aboriginal circles, where the former also includes Australian-born children of migrants. The focus on **culture** and its derivatives, such as **cultural identity** and cultural difference, rather than the more usual approach in terms of **ethnicity** and **race**, is deliberate and is used for two reasons. First,

we want to show that, notwithstanding the widespread lack of clarity in the use of the term *culture*, it provides a more useful starting point for understanding inequality among migrants and **Aborigines**. The broader term culture emphasises the point that these social categories have something in common with other cultural categories, rather than being exclusive, as implied by the derivative concepts of ethnicity and race. Put differently, a more macro, inclusive cultural approach is closer to formal theory than the substantive theory that springs from an exclusive race- and ethnic-relations approach. Second, by identifying the similarity between migrants, Aborigines and other cultural categories, we bring a critical edge to the use of concepts such as ethnicity, **ethnic group** and race. They are not static or given entities that can easily be employed to explain social behaviour within social categories such as migrants, second-generation migrants and Aborigines.

In this chapter the implications of the theoretical and empirical insights for understanding inequality unfold progressively. Beginning with a critical analysis of the concept of culture, we demonstrate that certain erroneous assumptions concerning the role of culture have crept into approaches to ethnicity and ethnic group formation. Specifically, the assumption that ethnicity exists because it is a cultural given, which in turn explains ethnic group formation, is flawed. It is flawed because it fails to acknowledge the role of migrants' perceived disadvantage and inequality in explaining ethnic group formation. We then demonstrate how this flawed approach to culture extends into the development of official conceptions of **multiculturalism**. Apart from recognising that multiculturalism is a policy, and not a description of social reality for migrants, we show how the increasing importance placed on social equality in the development of multiculturalism over past decades is actually contradictory alongside its stress on the value of cultural identity and social cohesion. A different insight into inequality is obtained when we examine the actual circumstances in which migrants find themselves. There is, on the one hand, good evidence that migrants' elevation of cultural identity has enabled them to compete more equally in the world of work. On the other hand, their capacity to compete at the highest levels in terms of income, status and power is compromised by their elevation of cultural identity.

In turning to the situation of Aborigines, we identify a less obvious form of inequality that is superimposed over their inequality of life chances. It is their inequality of being able to define legitimate social knowledge about themselves, a situation that has implications for their collective psyche, their understanding of their place in Australia and their political aspirations. One observation that applies to migrants and Aborigines is that they are both located in social and political contexts. This is another way of saying that their empirical realities entail interaction with other categories or, more pointedly, involve politics. This

latter point has been historically overlooked in academic and other approaches to indigenous and migrant people in Australia (see chapters 8, 9 and 10). Before turning to an examination of a number of selected works in this area, it is worthwhile providing a brief background to the concept of culture. Recognition of the problems in the use of this concept provide a good preamble for understanding the links between cultural difference, identity and inequality.

The problem with culture

The term *culture* is vague and its use in social science has too often been imprecise and uncritical. Although social scientists' understandings of culture have undergone some development over recent decades, there are still taken-for-granted assumptions surrounding what it is and, more importantly, what it does. First-year texts in sociology, for instance, often note that the scholarly understanding of culture has its origins in nineteenth-century anthropology, where Tylor defined it as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (van Krieken et al. 2000:7). Sometimes culture is divided into material culture – the artefacts humans create, such as artworks, books, buildings and clothing – and non-material culture – the more abstract entities such as language, beliefs, customs and myths (Robertson, I. 1987:55; see also Broom, Bonjean and Broom 1990:35ff.). More recent approaches pay more attention to refining the non-material aspects of culture, especially those implicating patterns of consciousness, symbols and meanings (see, for example, Charlesworth 2000; Shearing and Ericson 1991; see also chapter 8, this volume). The problem is not so much the varying definitions of culture but the assumption that it is a concrete entity. More precisely, the problem is one of reification; that is, assuming that what is no more than an abstract term is actually a real thing. The problematical nature of this assumption is clearer and is compounded when one examines the way in which sociologists have approached the role of culture.

The longstanding assumption that culture does something in the social realm is pervasive. Again, this assumption surfaces in first-year texts. For example, van Krieken et al. (2000:7) note:

It is the concept of culture that sociologists use as an alternative to biological or psychological explanations of social phenomena. Cultural factors explain both how societies change and how societies are maintained ... At one level, the influence of culture on human beings is obvious. The kinds of activities people engage in ... are *culturally determined*. At another level, the influence of culture is less obvious. This is the way in which culture shapes our view of the world, influencing the assumptions we have about who we are, our location in the cos-

mos and how we should relate to other people. [van Krieken et al. 2000:7; emphasis in original; see also Robertson, I. 1987:59–60]

Identifying this assumption about culture being the explanation of social outcomes is not the same as saying that culture or cultural factors do not ever have any influence in the social realm. The key point we want to stress is that culture cannot automatically be assumed to be an influence on and the basis for an explanation. Arguably, it is this assumption about culture and cultural identity that drives their inclusion in sociology texts. It is this same assumption that we find in the role often attributed to the related but more specific concept of ethnicity. In the following section we examine the development of sociologists' approaches to the links between cultural difference, identity and inequality by turning to a number of key issues in Australian research on ethnic and race relations.

Assumptions surrounding cultural identity

Until the past few decades, sociologists have uncritically treated ethnicity as a subset of cultural identity – that is, self-identity and/or group identity – that derives from one or more of a variety of cultural ties or sources of one's distinctive culture. The elements that have been the rallying point of, or the 'ties that bind' in, distinctive cultural groupings vary, ranging from common language, religion or birthplace to common ancestry or historical experience. These ties are viewed as the symbolic markers that characterise particular groupings. We see, for instance, the importance of preservation of the French language among French Canadians, the role of religion in Northern Ireland, the significance of birthplace among Croats, the importance of common ancestry among secular Jews, and the recognition of a shared history among Aborigines. This list is not exhaustive, for there is also the importance of regional and subregional ties, as illustrated by the importance Italians attach to their village of origin, or *paese*, rather than their original citizenship or sense of national origin (Lewins 1978). There is also the role of common citizenship, for instance, in the development of an Australian national identity, which is discussed in chapter 8. Finally, these ties or markers are not mutually exclusive, for we see among Ukrainian Catholics in Australia a prominence of their common religion and birthplace (Kringas and Lewins 1981).

Before one can understand how cultural identity or ethnicity is related to social inequality, it is first necessary to examine certain mistaken assumptions surrounding cultural identity. The first is the assumption that culture entails cultural identity. Where, for example, the cultural signifier is birthplace – say, Greece – it does not follow that Greek-born individuals have a sense of Greek

identity, either collectively or at the level of the self. This presumption of ethnicity, or the mistake of moving from membership of a category (for example, born in Greece, having French as one's mother tongue) to the having of a particular type of cultural identity (for example, feeling 'Greek', being 'French'), ignores the role of migrants' own experiences. In other words, applying our holistic model, it is a mistake to attempt to derive self-experience (feeling 'Greek') from a facet of empirical reality (for example, born in Greece). Each domain needs to be established separately.

The problems of this mistaken assumption are compounded because of their close proximity to the second assumption, which is that there are certain consequences of an individual's cultural identity. Consistent with the wider assumption concerning the determinant role of culture, there has been a similarly strong conviction in the field of race and ethnic relations that ethnicity is worth studying because of its role in the social realm. The second mistaken assumption follows from the first, in that, because of individuals' identification with key markers, such as language, birthplace or religion, this identity is the reason for ethnic group formation (see McKay and Lewins 1978; McKay 1982). Here the mistake is assuming that cultural identity explains group formation. In short, the problems are compounded by two linked, mistaken assumptions involving cultural identity: that membership of a category leads to cultural identity, which, in turn, leads to group formation. The problems with these assumptions are illustrated more fully in the following examination of selected research on migrants.

A closer look at the role of cultural identity

The two mistaken assumptions we have identified are related and often appear together in the sociological literature. The conceptual confusion surrounding the relationship between culture, cultural identity and organisational consequences, or, more specifically, between culture, ethnicity and ethnic group formation, has a long history in the sociology of ethnic and race relations. As early as 1974, Michael Hechter observed the 'obscure' origins of ethnic identity and group formation. As he saw it,

This obscurity derives partly from conceptual, and partly from empirical considerations ... there is no standard definition of ethnicity, let alone agreement on its explanation ... there is a serious lack of evidence about changes in the ethnic solidarity of particular groups over time ... social scientists have often been content to consider ethnicity less as a phenomenon to be explained than a given, a defining attribute of particular groups. [Hechter 1974:1151–2; see also McKay and Lewins 1978]

This conceptual confusion was evident in the 1960s. Gordon (1964:24, 27), for instance, wrote that a ‘convenient term for this sense of peoplehood is “ethnicity” and we shall refer to a group with a shared feeling of peoplehood as an “ethnic group”’. He added that when ‘I use the term “ethnic group” ... I shall mean by it any group which is defined or set off by race, religion or national origin, or some combination of these categories’ (Gordon 1964:27). Gordon’s first quotation does not necessarily entail a causal link between cultural identity/ethnicity and ethnic group formation but, presumably, the second quotation does. Culture leads to group formation with cultural identity as an intervening factor. Apart from their tautological nature and the lack of conceptual precision, Gordon’s comments have no explanation for why ethnic groups emerge in the first place.

There is a similar problem in Greeley’s early work on ethnicity in the United States. Specifically, the assumption he makes is that culture leads to cultural identity. As he says:

When we asked a respondent what his nationality or background was, we *assumed* that his answer, ‘Irish’ or ‘Italian’, indicated the *possible* presence of a predisposition to attitudes, values, norms, and behavior that were part of the baggage of the immigrant group brought from their countries of origin. [Greeley 1974:91; emphasis added]

The mistaken assumptions concerning the nature of, and relationships between, ethnicity and ethnic group formation are important for our understanding of cultural identity and inequality. As we foreshadowed above, these mistaken assumptions have distracted our attention from the role of the migrant experience in explaining ethnic group formation. Before turning to these issues, it is useful to provide a little more background to the mistaken use of the broad concepts of identity and group formation (see ‘The McKay and Lewins typology’, page 112).

Explaining cultural identity and organisation

Addressing the question of why cultural identity, or ethnicity, exists and the nature of its consequences is the final element preceding our discussion of its role in inequality. Having challenged some key assumptions concerning the relationships between culture, cultural identity and group formation, and having considered the utility of the McKay and Lewins typology, a critical look at the role of cultural identity is warranted.

Drawing on the variety of situations conveyed by the McKay and Lewins typology, we can see the importance of recognising the importance of the

The McKay and Lewins typology

In an attempt to clarify the conceptual confusion surrounding the relationship between culture, cultural identity and ethnic group formation, McKay and Lewins (1978) developed a typology that provided a starting point for the analysis of cultural identity and ethnic group formation. It attempted to incorporate the variation of cultural identity within and among migrant communities, and the fact that not all individuals from migrant backgrounds form ethnic groups.

Concerning variation of cultural identity, McKay and Lewins argued that scholars had not made an important distinction between two different *types* of cultural identity – ethnic awareness and ethnic consciousness. In clarifying the distinction between these types, they noted:

Ethnic awareness exists when an individual knows that (s)he possesses a certain ethnic trait(s) which is no more meaningful than his or her other cultural, physical, social or territorial characteristics. In terms of an individual's self definition, ethnic awareness may derive from interaction in organizations ... or from perceived membership in a wider social category (e.g. 'Queenslander', 'European'), but this source of identification is only one of a number of avenues of self identification. For example, for some Queenslanders the awareness of being a 'Queenslander' is no more significant than, say, also being 'elderly', 'female' or 'middle class'. [McKay and Lewins 1978:415]

By contrast, individuals with ethnic consciousness

know they possess a specific ethnic trait(s) but for them this characteristic assumes considerable importance. Its saliency is evident in the way in which it influences other cultural, social or territorial attributes and modes of individual identification. Whereas ethnically aware individuals display an elementary feeling of solidarity, ethnically conscious individuals manifest strong sentiments about their uniqueness. A 'we' versus 'them' mentality exists *vis-à-vis* other groups and there is more likely to be social tension and conflict. [McKay and Lewins 1978:416–17]

In short, different individuals with the same ethnic trait(s) can display different types of cultural identity, from weak cultural identity for those with little ethnic awareness, to intense cultural identity for those with ethnic consciousness. This claim corresponds to our earlier challenge of the assumption that culture automatically leads to cultural identity.

In terms of the fact that not all individuals from migrant backgrounds form ethnic groups, McKay and Lewins go on to demonstrate that culture does not necessarily lead to group formation. In noting the conceptual confusion surrounding the inappropriate use of the term 'ethnic group', they claim that the 'assumption that, because a number of individuals possess a similar socio-demographic characteristic(s) they automatically constitute a social group is untenable' (McKay and Lewins 1978:414). In other words, that individuals belong to a social category, such as being born in the Baltic states, does not necessarily lead to those individuals forming groups around that characteristic. Turning to the other logical possibility – the assumption that cultural identity leads to group formation – McKay and Lewins show that '*a high level of ethnic identification does not necessarily entail group formation and group formation does not necessarily involve high levels of ethnic identification among all individuals*' (McKay and Lewins 1978:417–18; emphasis in original). By critically examining the related and often taken-for-granted assumptions that culture leads to cultural identity, which in turn leads to group formation, the McKay and Lewins typology (see table 6.1) turns these assumptions into questions: Why does cultural identity, or ethnicity, exist and what are its consequences?

Table 6.1 Examples of combination of ethnic identification and ethnic structuration

Type of identification	Type of structuration	
	Ethnic category	Ethnic group
Ethnic awareness	Brazilian Negroes (Glazer 1975)	St Patrick's Day marchers Participants in Scottish clan festival
	Polish-Americans (Sandberg 1974)	Ethnic 'manipulators' (Lyman and Douglass 1973)
Ethnic consciousness	Basque shepherders (Douglass 1973)	Hausa traders (Cohen 1969)
	Ethnic 'orphans' (Feldstein and Costello 1974)	Italian-Catholics in Australia (Lewins 1975)
		Tunisian Jews (Deshen 1974) Basque separatists Front de libération du Québec (FLQ)

Source: McKay and Lewins 1978:423

degrees of manifestation of cultural identity and group formation. As Cohen (1974:14–15) put it clearly some years ago,

ethnicity is a matter of degree. In some situations ethnicity amounts to no more than the exchange of jokes between different culture groups at the strange and bizarre nature of one another's customs. In other situations it leads to violence.

We are still left with a question rather than a given: Why do ethnicity and ethnic groups exist?

We are not saying that cultural traits do not ever lead to cultural sentiments and subsequent group organisation. They can and do, but this is not the only cause of cultural identity and group formation. There is a long-established tradition that seeks to explain these ethnic phenomena in terms of political and economic interests (Cohen 1974; Despres 1975; Glazer and Moynihan 1975). Although the latter interests might appear to have a greater and more immediate relationship to inequality, cultural sentiments and political and economic interests are important. We are not replacing a culturally driven, essentialist or primordialist explanation with a political and economic approach. As McKay and Lewins (1978:422) clearly state concerning the latter,

we have no reservations about applying this 'theory of political and economic mobilization' ... to *some* ethnic groups in *certain* situations, [but] we feel that it does not apply to *all* ethnic phenomena. [emphasis in original]

The important insights to emerge from this discussion are that the explanation of ethnic group formation is: (1) not an automatic extension of an assumed

causal relationship between cultural traits, such as birthplace, and cultural identity or primordial attachments; and (2) not an either/or outcome of primordial/essentialist or political/economic factors. Both have their applications and can coexist. This is evident in McKay's (1982) matrix approach, which locates ethnic groups on two axes, one based on cultural interests and the other on political and economic interests. Ukrainian Catholics in Australia, for example, have high cultural and low political and economic interests. By contrast, McKay's 'pseudo ethnics', such as Queensland secessionists, have low cultural but high political and economic interests. The following section addresses the broad question of how an individual's experience or non-experience of culture is related to inequality in Australia and our attempts to explain it. Our response to this question will pick up on aspects of the discussion in the previous chapter, namely the importance of showing how culture is implicated in or related to the structure of inequality, the factors producing it, the factors maintaining it, and the effects of that inequality.

Multiculturalism as policy

The idea of multiculturalism has evolved over the past few decades. It started as an idea attributed to Al Grassby, the Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Labor government of the early 1970s, and later became the organising principle of government policy aimed at migrant settlement and approaches to cultural diversity. Multiculturalism is an important development because, in all its manifestations since the 1970s, it has linked the value of preserving cultural identity with a concern for equality or social justice (Theophanous 1995:xix; see also chapter 9, this volume). This concern for equality has often been explicit, as the following 'principles of multiculturalism' indicate. Adopted by the House of Representatives in March 1988 as a motion in support of multiculturalism, the first three principles indicate both the broad texture of the sentiments behind multiculturalism and its concern for equality:

- (i) Australians of all backgrounds are free and able to participate at all levels in the political, administrative, legal, economic, cultural and artistic life of the nation;
- (ii) There should be freedom to maintain one's cultural heritage within the context of a common legal and political system, with English as the accepted language;
- (iii) All Australians should be free from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or culture and should have equality of opportunity. [quoted in Theophanous 1995:xviii]

A difficulty in analysing the various expressions of multiculturalism in relation to social inequality is the extent to which one is concerned with multiculturalism as policy and principles or multiculturalism as outcomes. Concerning the latter, we will shortly address the empirical reality, including what is meant by the notion of social equality, by showing that the everyday reality among migrant communities does not match the sentiments embedded in policy. First, though, in terms of multiculturalism as policy, it is worth examining more closely the development of thinking in official circles because of its inconsistencies and contradictions in linking cultural identity and social equality. Multiculturalism as policy poses a difficult task for analysis, for it is a field in which 'thousands of items have been published' and where there 'are significant gaps, and some problem areas, in available historical accounts' (Lopez 2000:8). A closer look at this 'ideology promoted by a policy community', as Lopez (2000:446) characterises multiculturalism, indicates that it is often a recycling of earlier assimilationist or Anglo-conformist thinking alongside the attempt to keep migrant and ethnic issues separated from politics (see also Hage 1998).

What, then, are the common themes that run through the many statements of multiculturalism over the past twenty-five years? Turning to the many reports, from the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council's 'brown paper' *Australia as a Multicultural Society* (1977) to the National Multicultural Advisory Council's *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness* (1999), and statements by key government figures, three recurring themes emerge: the value of preserving cultural identity, the importance of attaining social equality, and the importance of maintaining social cohesion. Cultural identity stresses the importance of preserving one's mother tongue, kin ties, ethnic customs and religion and their relation to the formation of an individual's sense of identity. This theme is clearly evident, for example, in the Galbally Report (Galbally 1978), which viewed the identification and promotion of cultural identity as a key factor in the success of multiculturalism. The report's authors claimed that migrants 'have the right to maintain their cultural and racial identity and that it is clearly in the best interests of our nation that they should be encouraged and assisted to do so if they wish' (Galbally 1978:27).

The second theme, social equality, identifies inequality in the migrant sector of Australian society, as illustrated by their under-representation in higher occupational levels, political decision-making and trade unions, and their corresponding over-representation in the lowest-paid jobs. The identification of migrants' social inequality and the stress placed on achieving equality for individuals from migrant backgrounds surfaces in most reports over the past twenty-five years, such as the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council's *Australia as a Multicultural Society* (1977), the report to the premier from the Ethnic Affairs Commission of

NSW, titled, in brief, *Participation* (1978), and the Office of Multicultural Affairs' *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia: Sharing Our Future* (1989). Social cohesion, the third theme, emphasises a number of sentiments, such as the value of a united Australia, freedom from conflict and tension, the ability of existing institutions to cope with migrant problems, and the importance of the 'Australian way of life'. Possibly the best expression of this holistic sentiment was Al Grassby's metaphor of the 'family of the nation' to characterise the oneness of a multicultural Australia. In an interview with Lopez in 1994, Grassby reflected on this metaphor saying, 'Everybody was embraced in the family of the nation' (Lopez 2000:202; see also chapter 10, this volume).

These three themes have not always been equally emphasised in statements related to multiculturalism. Over the years some have been particularly prominent, such as the strong emphasis on social equality in the Jupp Report in 1986 (Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs 1986). What is important is that all themes have persisted and, more important, have a definite order of priority where they appear together. Note, for example, the statement of the former prime minister Bob Hawke at the opening of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council office in 1984:

'Multicultural' is more than a descriptive term to designate a society made up of different ethnic groups. It is also an approach to policy formulation and resource allocation which seeks to provide for *equality and access and opportunity*. It designates a society which supports a *common group of institutions, legal rights and obligations*, while leaving individuals free to *maintain their religion, language and cultural customs*. A multicultural society is a vital and tolerant and progressive community in which all groups, be they Aboriginal, Anglo-Celtic, European, Asian, Latin American, or Middle Eastern, or from any other of the ethnic groupings we find in our society today, make an important contribution to the richness, the depth and traditions of our nation. [quoted in Theophanous 1995:28; emphasis added; see discussion of equality of opportunity and outcomes in chapter 1, this volume]

If the priority of social cohesion is weakly implied in Hawke's statement, then it is clearly explicit in the earlier Galbally Report. As noted above, this report stressed that

migrants have the right to maintain their cultural and racial identity and that it is clearly in the best interests of our nation that they should be encouraged and assisted to do so if they wish. [Galbally 1978:28]

Later, however, it makes clear its priorities when it adds that maintenance of this identity is acceptable, 'provided that ethnic identity is not stressed at the expense of society at large, but is woven into the fabric of our nationhood' (Galbally 1978:104). Demonstrating the continuity of the theme of social cohesion with the same stress on the priority of a unified nation, the same sen-

timent surfaces more than a decade later in the government's *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, which prescribed that '*all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests and future first and foremost; multicultural policies require all Australians to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society*' (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989:vii; emphasis added).

The priority given to social cohesion brings us back to the earlier claim made by Lopez that multicultural thinking has attempted to keep migrant issues and politics separated, and thus exposes itself as a recycling of earlier assimilationist or Anglo-conformist thinking. By not acknowledging the role of the political process (and this certainly has not been acknowledged in any systematic way in any official statement of multiculturalism), multicultural policy indicates no problem in integrating the themes of cultural identity, social equality and social cohesion (cf. Kane 1997:121–2). The evidence for this claim is the 'ethnic dilemma', which is the inconsistency in reconciling the maintenance of cultural identity and attaining social equality. Given the earlier discussion of ethnic group formation, especially groups that mobilise around cultural ties to advance particular interests, it is not possible for such groups to elevate their cultural identity in the pursuit of goals and, at the same time, maintain social harmony and freedom from conflict. Put another way, given Anglo-Celtic control of key institutions, such as the economy, law, health and trade unions, it is not possible for those from migrant backgrounds to express their cultural identity by forming ethnic groups and, at the same time, adopt the normative characteristics of the Anglo-Celtic-controlled opportunity structure in pursuit of more social equality. The evidence for this picture is varied and ranges from Jean Martin's (1972) identification of conformist expectations in Australian institutional life as 'the ideology of settlement', to the actual responses of those institutions (Martin, Jean I. 1978; see also Kringas and Lewins 1981; Kringas 1984; Lewins 1984).

This dilemma is not new. Some years ago it was characterised by Wiley (1967) as an 'ethnic mobility trap', where the further individuals from migrant backgrounds pursue their cultural identities in their own communities by forming their own organisations, the more they trap themselves and prevent participation in the dominant institutions where most social rewards exist. In Wiley's model the opportunity structure is viewed as

a tree and mobility as tree climbing ... The limbs are ... leading gently upward but primarily outward and away from all chance of serious ascent. Normally the climber who wants to hit the top will avoid the limbs as much as possible and concentrate on the trunk. [Wiley 1967:148–9]

To take an empirical example, Australia's legal fraternity has a hierarchical opportunity structure in terms of prestige and income. There are, for instance,

solicitors found in suburban practices and in the public service. On the other hand, there are judges in a hierarchy of courts, with the occasional member of the High Court ascending to the 'top job' of governor-general. In Wiley's terms, the more solicitors from migrant backgrounds pursue their careers within their migrant communities by emphasising that they are from those communities and are there to serve them, the more they 'go out on a limb' away from the main trunk, where the prize opportunities exist. Although such solicitors could reach the top within their own migrant opportunity structure, that position cannot equate with ascending the trunk. To be upwardly mobile in an effort to attain more equality relative to other solicitors, it is necessary for migrant solicitors to relinquish their cultural traits, possibly change their names, descend their branches and join the trunk. There is thus a trade-off between maintaining cultural identity and the attainment of more social equality. A definite qualification is warranted at this point. This ethnic dilemma is not something we celebrate. We are not saying this is a good thing or that individuals from migrant backgrounds should fit into this pattern. What we are saying is that this is the situation in Australia.

The apolitical nature of multicultural discourse in Australia cannot reconcile the maintenance of cultural identity and the achievement of social equality because of the threat to social cohesion. It is not immediately apparent, but this expectation that individuals from migrant backgrounds need to play down their cultural identity in the interests of social cohesion is a constant thread running through official statements on migrant settlement over the past few decades. Put differently, the strong theme of social cohesion in multicultural thinking explicitly expects individuals from migrant backgrounds to 'fit in' or, as the actual words of the National Agenda indicate: 'multicultural policies require all Australians to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society' (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989:vii). This expectation of conformity, that it is the migrant who must change and adapt, is more explicit in previous policies of multiculturalism, the policies of assimilation and integration, and in institutional responses to migrants over this same period (see Martin, Jean I. 1972, 1978; Lewins 2001).

Once we acknowledge the role of the political it becomes clear that cultural identity and social equality cannot coexist. What this means is that the increased access of migrant interest groups to resources, such as education, political power and health care, has only come about, and will only continue to increase, through their recognition of their special needs, their articulation and propagation of those needs, their organising and mobilising around those needs, and their lobbying to effect change. Their increased access to key social resources has only come about through their growing recognition that they are responsible for their own future and for effecting the change to realise it. If one accepts

this politicised strategy as the main path for migrant groups to realise their goals, and given that key institutions such as education, the economy and health are controlled by Anglo-Celtic Australians, it is clear that migrant efforts to increase their access to the resources that these institutions control will continue to be viewed by Anglo-Celtic Australians as undesirable because it is counter to social cohesion. This is not surprising, because the type of migrant political activity we are talking about entails political confrontation, which entails conflict and tension. In short, the structural change required to provide migrant groups with greater social equality does not come about merely by asking for it. There is ready acceptance of the role of politics and conflict in trade-union–employer-group disputes, and Aboriginal and women’s issues. Why should migrant groups’ quests for greater equality be viewed differently?

The argument thus far is that the three themes evident in statements of multiculturalism – the elevation of the value of cultural identity, social equality and social cohesion – are contradictory. Indirectly, this claim is supported by the attacks on multiculturalism over the years from the political left and right. The latter have objected to multiculturalism primarily because of its undermining of national identity and/or social cohesion. Put differently, this objection to multiculturalism is close to being a case of explicit Anglo-conformism that balks at any change to the status quo of Anglo-Celtic control of key social institutions. It is represented by figures such as Geoffrey Blainey (1984), Lauchlan Chipman (1980), Frank Knopfmacher (1982) and Stephen Fitzgerald (Committee to Advise on Australia’s Immigration Policies 1988). Blainey was the most explicit in defending the status quo. Commentators such as Theophanous (1995:33) are direct in criticising Blainey, noting that he ‘attacked multiculturalism, arguing that it was divisive and undermined social cohesion’. He leaves no doubt about Blainey’s adherence to and valuing of a prevailing Anglomorph dominance, saying Blainey ‘concluded that the key features of the philosophy and practice of multiculturalism ... undermined Australia’s national identity and threatened social cohesion’. Such criticisms were not exaggerated, for Blainey’s own words tell the same story. As he says in his obviously hastily written polemic *All for Australia* (Blainey 1984:159–60), multiculturalism ‘ignores the truth’ and Australia’s fortunes will suffer if this type of immigration policy is allowed to ‘destroy our sense of cohesion and our pride in the past’ (see chapter 10, this volume).

The critics of multiculturalism from the left of the political spectrum, such as de Lepervanche (1980) and Jakubowicz (1984a), focus on the powerful interest groups of the receiving society, namely the Australian ruling class and its use of cultural dominance to advantage its own situation at the expense of migrants. As they see it, multiculturalism is an ideological device that obscures the more important bases of social solidarity, such as class. They view the promotion of

ethnicity as a conservative strategy used by capital to deflect attention away from inequalities at the workplace and override class-consciousness (Jakubowicz 1984a:28; Jupp 1997:137; see also Jakubowicz 1984b). According to de Lepervanche (1990:210; see also 184, 216),

multiculturalism constitutes little more than an ideology that attempts to resolve the contradictions between the immigrants' increasing awareness of inequality and the efforts of the powerful to defuse the social conflict attendant upon increasing class consciousness and competition for status.

These critics have argued that multicultural policy has promoted an elite group within targeted ethnic communities through the relationship that develops between the state bureaucracies and those representing ethnic groups (see Collins 1988:239–41). This client–patron relationship helps maintain control over the forms of ethnicity that the state tolerates. Resources tend to be channelled into those organisations that the state deems acceptable, or to those that support government initiatives. Far from constituting a new divide between a university-educated new class and the rest of society, these relations between an ethnic elite and the state are subordinate to existing relations of class and gender inequality, suggests de Lepervanche (1990:189): ‘Most ethnic leaders and spokespeople are men, and they represent male and bourgeois interests rather than those of women or the working class majority’ (see chapter 10, this volume).

The critics of multicultural policy help us identify the implicit thread running through multicultural policy; that is, the expectation that migrants fit into an Anglo-Celtic-dominated Australian society. We have seen that critics on the right have something in common with the more implicit assumptions in government multicultural policy, in that there is the assumption of value in an Anglo-Celtic-controlled Australia. The problem, as these critics see it, is that the government skirts the issue and, although stressing the priority of social cohesion over cultural identity, does not make explicit its assumptions, and therefore does not make sufficiently clear the importance of Anglo-Celtic dominance. On the other hand, the critics on the left have something in common with government multicultural policy in that they stress the importance of achieving social equality for all Australians. The problem, as the left sees it, is that the government's lack of interventionist policy to grapple with systematic inequality helps confirm its defence of Anglo-Celtic dominance.

To this point we have been discussing multiculturalism as policy; that is, as a set of ideas, principles and/or statements about the nature of how people from migrant backgrounds could and should settle in Australia. It needs to be stressed, however, that multiculturalism as policy is more than merely ideas and principles. To the extent that such ideas and principles are used in official

circles, such as in speeches and discussion papers, they imply not only a certain understanding of reality, but also its legitimacy. This situation is illustrated by prominent figures such as Sandy Hollway, who, as acting secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, gave a keynote address to the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration in 1992. In his paper, titled 'Multiculturalism as Public Administration: Myths, Challenges and Opportunities', he made 'much of the success the government [had] had in managing cultural diversity through *the use of the principles of access and equity*' (Archer 1997:32; emphasis added). Ideas and principles, however, are not an automatic indication of what actually happens in the empirical realm. Based on evidence from a wide variety of social settings, we should always approach the relationship between policy and outcomes with a question as to whether one follows the other, rather than assuming it to be the case. Consistent with the principle of our holistic model, there is a need to examine the empirical situation of individuals from migrant backgrounds as it relates to social inequality. In effect we are turning to multiculturalism in practice.

Multiculturalism in practice: The empirical picture

The everyday reality for many people from migrant backgrounds stands in contrast to the optimistic picture in official statements, especially those relating to the importance and achievement of social equality. Drawing attention to this disjuncture between policy and reality is not a radical move. It is more than implicit in other commentators on multiculturalism, such as Jupp, who describes multiculturalism as 'a rudimentary social and political *vision* of an *ideal* Australian society, as well as a range of *policies* for its attainment' (Jupp 1997:132–3; emphasis added). Although the next section will take a closer look at how the concept of social inequality has been used and will raise questions concerning its limits, it is worth noting at this point that most references to social inequality are concerned with material factors that affect life chances. These factors, which were discussed in the previous chapter, include income and wealth and, less directly, education and jobs. Accordingly, this discussion will explore this aspect of social inequality among specific migrant categories in relation to their cultural identity.

The contrast between the sentiments of multicultural policy and the actual, everyday reality for many individuals from migrant backgrounds has long been recognised by scholars (see, for example, Jupp 1986; Castles, S. 1992; Jambrozik et al. 1995). In terms of the material aspects of social inequality, research has focused particularly on migrants' disadvantaged position in the labour market. This focus is not surprising, given the relationship between jobs and

life chances, especially the former's effect on income, wealth and one's children's education. There are a number of factors that help to explain the disadvantaged position of migrants in the labour market. Low levels of education affect all Australians, but there are additional factors, such as weak English-language skills and the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, that are largely confined to migrants only. As the first and third of these factors suggest, different factors have affected different migrant categories (see chapter 9).

A large proportion of the early Italian migrants who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, and the bulk of the first Vietnamese refugees who came to Australia in the mid-1970s, were seriously disadvantaged by extremely low levels of education. This disadvantage was evident in their being able to obtain only low-paid, unskilled factory work, and in their subsequent lack of social mobility (Lewins and Ly 1985; see also Population and Immigration Council 1976; Giorgas 2000). These Vietnamese refugees represent a good case study because they included a minority who had had, relatively speaking, high levels of education and had held white-collar jobs in Vietnam. Although they initially had to settle for the same type of low-paid factory work as their compatriots, within a decade they were more likely to have undertaken further education in Australia and to have regained their white-collar jobs and incomes (Lewins and Ly 1985).

By contrast, more recent migrants are disadvantaged by lack of recognition of their overseas qualifications. Since the mid-1990s, around half of migrants have arrived with post-school qualifications. Of these, close to 80 per cent with higher degrees have had their qualifications recognised, whereas the figure is closer to half for those with skilled or basic vocational qualifications (see table 6.2). Recognition of qualifications is closely related to jobs, a claim indirectly

Table 6.2 Qualifications profile of two samples of recently arrived migrants^a

	1996 (%)	1999 (%)
Migrants who arrived with post-school qualifications	49	55
Migrants who were skilled or had basic vocational qualifications	41	35
Migrants with bachelor's degree or higher	37	34
Migrants whose qualifications were recognised in Australia:		
• skilled or basic vocational qualifications	52	48
• bachelor's degree	56	56
• higher degrees	80	77

^a Migrants in the 1996 ABS survey arrived after 1970, whereas those in the 1999 survey arrived after 1980.

Sources: ABS 1996, 1999b.

supported by the observation that, in 1999, a fifth of migrant trades and related workers were in the same occupation as they were before migrating, whereas nearly double the proportion of professionals were in the same occupation (ABS 1999b:13). More specifically, in terms of the earlier point about different migrant categories being disadvantaged for different reasons, by the late 1990s 61 per cent migrants from Europe had their qualifications recognised, whereas only 30 per cent of migrants from South-East Asia gained such recognition (ABS 1999b:4).

The changing profiles of migrants' educational backgrounds over recent decades is also indicated by their changing levels of competence in English. As many as 29 per cent of migrants arriving since 1970 spoke only English at home, and well over half of those who spoke a language other than English at home spoke English well or very well (ABS 1996:9). It appears that, among the more recent migrants, those who do not speak English at all are over-represented by females (ABS 1996:23; 1999b:20). It is worth pointing out that, in the light of this link between educational qualifications, competence in English and having a particular type of job, the situation of females from certain migrant backgrounds reinforces the claim that factors such as gender and cultural background are often closely related in shaping outcomes, especially where social inequality is concerned (see Bottomley and de Lepervanche 1984; McCall 2001). In terms of explaining patterns of inequality in the United States, McCall (2001) has coined the term *complex inequality* to capture these different configurations of inequality produced by the intersection of 'gender', 'class' and 'race' and mediated by 'region'. In urging adoption of this approach, she notes:

there must be greater attention to the rising and high levels of inequality among women by class and race ... Every dimension of inequality should be considered in any theoretical or political assessment of the equity implications of different paths of economic development. Likewise, no single dimension should be considered the most important a priori ... configurations of inequality emerge from the *reality* of multiple paths of economic development and conflicting outcomes from the same path, with no single path promising lower inequality of all kinds. [McCall 2001:58–9; emphasis in original]

McCall offers a number of important insights for understanding inequality in Australia. First, apart from identifying the complex of factors involved in shaping patterns of inequality, she corroborates our earlier claim that there is no single explanation of inequality. We have already pointed out that it is possible to identify factors that help explain the maintenance of patterns of inequality; it is another matter altogether to establish their causes. Second, she alludes to the importance of the empirical realm rather than trying to understand inequality at the level of policy. Her focus on the 'reality' of the multiple

paths of economic development is consistent with our emphasis on the inclusion of individuals' lived experiences in any theoretical approach to inequality. Finally, her notion of 'configurations of inequality', where 'race, gender and class intersect in a variety of ways depending on underlying economic conditions in local economies' (McCall 2001:6), suggests that time could also be added to these configurations. A place or region may have its own idiosyncrasies but these can change over time.

Returning to the key point of this discussion – that is, the relationship, among specific migrant categories, between social inequality and cultural identity – it is worth incorporating the dimension of history to see how migrant communities fare over time. Specifically, we want to examine the situation of second-generation migrants in terms of their access to jobs, which as we have seen affects life chances through its influence on income, wealth and educational opportunities for children. The second generation, as Australian-born children of migrants, have English-language competence, in many cases because it is their first language, and often higher levels of education than their parents. Also, they have a better working knowledge of Australian institutional life, such as dealing with bureaucracies and everyday commerce, and in many instances are, to use the Canadian expression celebrated in the 1970s, 'bi-lingual and bi-cultural'.

The most recent research on second-generation migrants is Giorgas's (2000) study of their labour-market experience. Comparing occupational outcomes for the first and second generations of migrants using 1986 Census data, she provides a number of useful insights. First, as tables 6.3 and 6.4 indicate, there are marked generational differences in occupational outcomes among the migrant categories. As she notes,

second generation Anglo-Celts, Hungarians and Poles have replicated the occupational patterns of their parents. To some extent, we can also say that there has been little change in the occupational patterns of first and second generation Dutch and Germans. This result contrasts with the position of second generation Greeks and Italians, who have not replicated the occupational patterns of their parental generation. [Giorgas 2000:101]

Giorgas makes the general point that the occupational outcomes of the second generation 'generally reflect their educational achievements' (Giorgas 2000:96). The generational contrast for Greeks and Italians, for example, shows that the second generation have moved away from the bottom end of the labour market and more towards the clerical and professional categories, which is consistent with their educational achievements (see table 6.5).

Another important insight Giorgas offers is her explanation of why different categories of second-generation migrants do not do equally well in the labour market (Giorgas 2000:117). Rather than focusing on migrants' educational

Table 6.3 Highest qualification achieved for second-generation migrants aged 18 to 34 years, 1986 Census (percentages)

Ancestry	Degree	Diploma	Trade certificate	Other certificate	No qual.	N (100%)	ID ^a
Males							
Anglo-Celt	8.8	2.9	30.0	5.0	53.4	282 874	-
Dutch	8.0	3.0	34.8	6.0	48.2	29 082	6.0
German	9.2	2.6	34.1	6.5	47.6	24 740	6.2
Hungarian	10.8	2.9	30.7	6.2	49.4	4 547	4.0
Polish	12.4	3.1	29.7	5.6	49.2	16 115	4.5
Italian	7.8	2.4	30.1	5.9	53.8	77 605	1.5
Greek	9.4	2.4	20.8	6.7	60.7	40 154	9.7
Females							
Anglo-Celt	7.0	4.7	17.9	4.5	65.9	280 551	-
Dutch	5.9	5.5	19.7	5.4	63.4	28 934	3.6
German	8.4	5.1	18.7	7.1	60.6	25 242	5.3
Hungarian	9.5	4.9	19.8	7.1	58.8	4 263	7.3
Polish	11.3	6.0	17.6	6.8	58.3	15 919	7.9
Italian	6.0	4.2	17.8	6.8	65.2	73 332	2.3
Greek	8.3	4.1	16.9	8.4	62.3	38 267	5.2

^a Indices of Dissimilarity with Anglo-Celts (the comparison group). The higher the value, the greater the dissimilarity.

Source: Georgas 2000:94.

Table 6.4 Occupational distribution for second-generation migrants, 1986 Census (percentages)^a

Ancestry	Manager and admin.	Professional	Clerical	Sales and service	Trades	Labour and related	Farming	N (100%)	ID^b
Males									
Anglo-Celt	11.26	20.32	8.71	8.48	23.84	23.20	4.20	42 036	
Dutch	6.67	19.20	7.38	8.00	34.07	22.24	2.45	18 238	10.2
German	7.59	20.47	8.16	8.02	30.60	22.32	2.85	17 247	6.9
Hungarian	7.45	28.03	12.94	4.96	21.92	24.21	0.50	2 619	13.0
Polish	7.72	28.65	14.27	4.68	21.72	22.43	0.53	9 533	13.9
Italian	7.78	16.34	9.21	10.39	29.78	20.19	6.32	58 861	10.5
Greek	9.07	20.10	11.20	14.05	23.56	20.43	1.59	22 374	8.1
Females									
Anglo-Celt	4.58	20.73	36.11	19.28	3.66	12.25	3.39	28 555	
Dutch	3.01	22.10	35.98	22.82	4.24	10.37	1.47	13 479	5.5
German	3.44	23.07	35.74	20.95	3.96	11.07	1.79	13 448	4.3
Hungarian	6.64	34.06	15.80	10.67	11.15	21.35	0.33	2 108	32.0
Polish	6.15	33.08	18.28	11.10	10.24	20.78	0.35	7 078	29.0
Italian	3.09	14.76	43.59	21.63	6.46	8.02	2.46	44 882	12.6
Greek	3.83	18.00	42.91	22.30	5.14	7.30	0.52	18 206	11.3

^a Percentages for full-time workers only.

^b Indices of Dissimilarity for comparisons with Anglo-Celts. Scale: 100 dissimilar – 0 no difference.

Source: Giorgas 2000:97.

Table 6.5 Occupational distribution for first-generation migrants, 1986 Census (percentages)^a

Ancestry	Manager and admin.	Professional	Clerical	Sales and service	Trades	Labour and related	Farming	N (100%)	ID^b
Males									
Anglo-Celt	12.42	22.95	7.38	8.60	24.18	22.97	1.51	79 298	
Dutch	14.48	20.89	5.97	7.30	27.39	20.61	3.37	35 424	7.1
German	13.21	19.64	4.97	5.88	34.46	19.68	2.18	35 755	11.7
Hungarian	9.39	26.79	12.44	3.44	23.86	23.45	0.63	9 972	9.4
Polish	11.40	32.06	10.88	3.99	20.55	20.40	0.74	18 078	12.6
Italian	8.58	7.75	3.69	6.65	30.91	37.12	5.30	87 050	24.7
Greek	9.67	7.36	4.06	9.72	23.68	43.81	1.69	48 683	22.2
Females									
Anglo-Celt	5.07	21.28	35.52	18.06	3.32	15.30	1.44	50 107	
Dutch	6.33	19.61	29.55	18.56	4.15	18.15	3.65	17 688	7.7
German	5.86	20.69	29.93	17.12	5.46	18.61	2.33	19 919	7.1
Hungarian	12.37	37.40	13.47	5.96	11.10	19.36	0.33	5 099	35.3
Polish	16.46	36.78	12.17	6.76	9.94	17.51	0.38	10 890	35.7
Italian	4.29	6.57	20.71	14.83	7.12	40.57	5.90	38 404	33.5
Greek	5.84	5.87	13.55	14.51	6.04	52.17	2.02	28 507	40.9

^a Percentages for full-time workers only.

^b Indices of Dissimilarity for comparisons with Anglo-Celts. Scale: 100 dissimilar – 0 no difference.

Source: Giorgas 2000:97.

achievements and their market value or 'human capital', she argues that socio-cultural factors are also important in explaining labour-market outcomes. The latter factors include the social cohesion of the migrant community, the maintenance of their cultural identity and the level of social distance they experience in relation to the wider Australian society (Giorgas 2000:189). It is this insight that directly involves the role of cultural identity and its relationship with social equality.

With Greeks and Italians, for example, Giorgas argues that their high social distance or restricted interaction with the Anglo-Celtic majority has reinforced their concentration in a few urban areas and their forming their own communities, which has provided them with security and a sense of belonging. Thus, 'Members of the second generation who remained integrated in their ethnic community were, thereby, better able to utilise alternative material and moral resources available from within that community' (Giorgas 2000:190).

This argument may, at first glance, contradict our earlier claim concerning the ethnic mobility trap, where the more migrants accentuate and elevate their own cultural identity and form their own distinctive migrant groups, the more they remove themselves from the core Anglo-Celtic institutions or dominant opportunity structure. Without knowing the precise jobs the second-generation migrants occupied it is not possible to be conclusive. So, although migrant communities with strong community links do provide social support and additional avenues of employment for their compatriots, a claim that we do not challenge, it is the case that, in Giorgas's study, second-generation Greeks and Italians have not fared as well as other categories.

To put it another way, for these categories a combination of human capital in the form of educational achievements that are valued in the labour market, combined with strong community support and associated high levels of cultural identity, have given second-generation Greeks and Italians, in relation to their parents, a more advantaged place in the opportunity structure. But, notwithstanding these gains, their lack of penetration into the highest levels of the labour market and the top jobs means that their success in the labour market is limited. Perhaps it is limited by the ethnic mobility trap.

Our discussion of social inequality to this point has focused on the more observable, material components that are frequently included in discussions of life chances. Income, wealth, access to education, housing and health care, as we have seen, are closely related and, arguably, are all largely contingent on type of occupation. In foreshadowing that this more material dimension is not the full extent of social inequality, we are not in any way diminishing its importance. Our aim in turning to other facets of inequality is to demonstrate less obvious ways in which it is related to cultural identity and thereby to extend our understanding of the variety of social contexts in which inequality is found.

Our discussion of primordial and mobilisationist approaches to the explanation of ethnic group formation and ethnicity demonstrated that cultural identity is not a given quality but a fluid aspect of people's lives that is closely related to their social and political contexts (see chapter 8). We saw how cultural identity is related to social inequality in policy and in actual empirical situations, such as labour-market participation. In that discussion our claim that multiculturalism is actually Anglo-conformist thinking in another guise points to a broader question: To what extent is all thought about cultural identity shaped and limited by wider social forces, and how might this impinge on social equality?

The social construction of Aboriginality

A convenient vehicle to explore this question is the notion of **Aboriginality**, which Beckett (1988b:1) defines as

the ways in which Aborigines select from their experience and their cultural heritage to communicate a sense of identity to their young people, to Aborigines of differing backgrounds, and to other Australians.

Consistent with our earlier discussion of culture, Beckett notes that anthropologists have regarded Aboriginality as 'unproblematic' or as a given, and have ignored the process of the 'cultural construction' of Aboriginality that is 'integral to the working out of relations between Aboriginal and European Australians' (Beckett 1988b:1; see also Lewins 1991).

The convenience of this example has to do with the need to consider whether Aborigines need to be singled out when it comes to explaining their levels of social inequality. Without entering into the debate as to whether Aborigines are different from migrant communities, there is no doubting that in terms of life chances Aborigines are the most disadvantaged people in Australia. Compared to the Anglo-Celtic sector of the population, they are fifteen times less likely to obtain a tertiary qualification. They have at least four times the unemployment rate of the non-Aboriginal population and are equally disadvantaged in terms of health, with life expectancy fifteen to twenty years lower than that of white Australians, infant mortality three to five times that of the wider population, and hospitalisation rates at least double that of non-Aborigines (Jones, F. 1991, 1993; de Looper and Bhatia 2001; Graetz and McAllister 1994). This empirical picture of Aboriginal disadvantage is not our main concern and has been well-documented elsewhere (see, for example, part 1). Our concern is to pick up on the notion of the cultural construction of Aboriginality, and to consider the question of how Aboriginality is shaped by wider

social forces and how these in turn impinge on the social equality of Aborigines. Perhaps put another way, the task is not to ascertain whether Aborigines have higher levels of social inequality, especially those related to life chances, for we already know that they do. Rather, we are more concerned to see whether the factors shaping Aboriginality as cultural identity are in any way related to the maintenance of Aborigines' social inequality.

Since the late 1980s there has been an increasing visibility of scholarly discussions of Aboriginality (see, for example, Beckett 1988a). The recognition that 'Aboriginality' is implicated in the working out of relations between Aboriginal and European Australians means that it can no longer be taken for granted as a given quality. Instead, it must be viewed as a dynamic social process with two distinct elements. First, there is Aboriginality constructed by Aboriginal people themselves. Capturing this dynamic aspect of identity construction, Cowlshaw (1988:88) quotes Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People without History* (1982):

groups are known to exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, to impart new evaluations or valences to them, to borrow forms more expressive of their interests, or to create wholly new forms to answer changed circumstances. Furthermore if we think of such interaction not as causative on its own terms but as responsive to larger economic and political forces, the explanation of cultural forms must take account of that larger context, that wider field of force. 'A culture' is thus better seen as a series of processes that construct, reconstruct and dismantle cultural determinants.

This claim corresponds to our earlier discussion of the explanation of cultural identity or ethnicity among migrant groups, where primordial and mobilisationist factors are at play, depending on particular social contexts. In the case of Aboriginality, the strong mobilisationist quality in the quotation above means that there is no static, homogenous Aboriginal culture and Aboriginality. Also, it suggests that separating traditional, primordial elements of culture from the more political or mobilisationist threads may not be very straightforward.

The second element in the formation of Aboriginality is the construction by white Australians of another version of Aboriginality. This public or social identity contains the patterned or structured images of Aborigines produced by public bodies, such as government bureaucracies and the media (Beckett 1988c:191). Aborigines' own constructions of Aboriginality and this wider social identity interact in that the latter provides a part of the social environment from which the former emerges. As Jordan (1988:111) notes, 'Aboriginal worlds and Aboriginal identity must be studied as they are conceptualised by both Aboriginal people and mainstream Australian society'. Cowlshaw

(1988:11), however, views this interaction as problematical for Aborigines, for their Aboriginality is an 'oppositional culture' that emerges from 'the active creation and protection ... of social meaning in an embattled situation'. In other words, Aboriginality is a defensive, hyphenate identity involving Aboriginal and, more implicit, white contributions.

The important insight from this situation, where Aborigines construct their own Aboriginal identities in a white social environment that also provides its own definitions of Aboriginality, is that the former does not occur in a social vacuum. In other words, Aborigines do not have total control over the construction of their own identities and social knowledge about Aborigines. We can be fairly confident that, historically, Aboriginal and white conceptions of Aboriginality have influenced each other. In recognising the implications of the influence of white conceptions of Aboriginality on Aborigines, Stokes (1997a:159), for example, notes:

To the extent that European ideologies of Aboriginal identity become myths, believed by both whites and Aborigines, and become institutionalised in laws, programs of protection, segregation and education, they continue to be powerful instruments of domination.

The term 'domination' is not an overstatement. It emphasises that the question of reciprocal influence is important because a key issue in the maintenance of any pattern of inequality is the extent to which categories of people, such as Aborigines, are resigned to their disadvantage or take their situation for granted, and believe that their understandings of why they are where they are, and who they are, are of their own creation.

There is an important distinction to be made between whether there are separate conceptions of Aboriginality and their reciprocal influence. In other words, *if* separate conceptions exist, do they influence each other? There is little doubt about the existence of Aboriginalities, but, as noted above, we can only be 'fairly confident' about reciprocal influence because the proponents of these conceptions have not always been aware of reciprocity and, arguably, have held mistaken views about their own or the other's conception of Aboriginality. On the non-Aboriginal side, government conceptions of Aboriginality have certainly been increasingly responsive to the Aboriginal view. Certainty and tautologies have given way to a degree of flexibility. In the 1930s the New South Wales Protection Act defined an Aborigine as 'any full blooded or half-caste Aborigine who is native of Australia, and who is temporarily or permanently resident in New South Wales'. This act gave the Aboriginal Protection Board considerable power over the lives of Aborigines or people 'designated' Aborigines – that is, 'any person *apparently* having an admixture of Aboriginal

blood' – in that the board could require them to live on an Aboriginal reserve (Stokes 1997a:161; emphasis in original).

Certainly, by the early 1980s the Land Rights Act indicated the Federal Government's assumption of its right to construct legitimate social knowledge about Aborigines, but there is a discernible shift towards an incorporation of Aborigines' own understandings. Section 4(1) of the act states that an 'Aboriginal' means a person who (a) is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia; (b) identifies as an Aboriginal; and (c) is accepted by the Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal (Creamer 1988:48; see also Stokes 1997a:167). Perhaps in an unintended way, the incorporation of Aborigines' own creation of social knowledge about themselves is indicated by the mistaken concerns in sectors of white Australia that 'control over the definition of Aboriginality has passed out of their hands' (Creamer 1988:48), and that, in the light of governments' loss of control over social knowledge about Aborigines, current definitions of Aboriginality could extend to include white people passing as Aborigines (Sykes 1989).

In terms of the influence of white sentiments on Aboriginal conceptions of Aboriginality, Stokes (1997a) heads off the view that Aborigines' conceptions of themselves did not emerge until the 1960s. He draws on the pamphlet 'Aborigines claim citizen's rights!', published in the magazine the *Publicist* in 1938. Written by Jack Patten and William Ferguson, this pamphlet presents a strident counter to the prevailing white view of Aborigines. As Stokes (1997a:162) says:

They rejected the official definitions of Aboriginal people as 'outcasts', 'backward' and 'inferior', as beings who need constant supervision by government officials. They pointed out how cartoons, popular jokes and ridicule reinforced the official stereotypes. These writers were well aware of the political implications of the official ideology of Aboriginality: 'You, who originally conquered us by guns against our spears, now rely on superiority of numbers to support your false claims of moral and intellectual superiority'.

There is no doubt that Patten and Ferguson were offering an alternative understanding of Aborigines, but that understanding included and was influenced by white European political sentiments and moral judgements of Aborigines. As Stokes (1997a:162) continues:

Nonetheless, their [Patten's and Ferguson's] politics were assimilationist: 'We have no desire to go back to primitive conditions of the Stone Age. We ask you to teach our people to live in the Modern Age, as modern citizens.' Reflecting the scientific prejudices of the time, they argued that a 'mixture of Aboriginal and white races was practicable', and further, that the black race could be absorbed into the white race within three generations, 'without any fear of a "throw-back"'.

This ‘cringe’ response indicating the influence of white European assumptions about Aborigines has shaped Aboriginal conceptions of their identity for decades. In the 1990s, Noel Pearson, the former director of the Cape York Land Council, viewed racist assumptions of Aboriginal inferiority as central to white beliefs about Aborigines. As he asks, ‘Who can say that notions of racial inferiority rooted in a violent past do not still infect our national psyche?’ (quoted in Stokes 1997a:166).

As a final comment, the critical issue is not so much whether Aborigines have articulated their own Aboriginality, its content, and even whether it has been influenced by white precepts. Rather, it is the extent to which Aborigines understand the nature of their inequality in terms of the control of the production of social knowledge about themselves. This understanding is tied to the extent of their recognition of the legitimacy of their speaking for themselves – defining their own identities and developing their own ends (see Morris 1988:76). Legitimate social knowledge about Aborigines is still largely in the hands of white-controlled institutions. Although many Aborigines recognise the need to define their own identities and the importance of resisting ‘the seduction of assimilation and [to be] confidently working at rebuilding a unique identity’ (Ariss 1988:136), their stance lacks analytical insight into the nature of the white domination in Australia.

We are saying that ‘white’ is more appropriate than ‘Anglo-Celtic’, because it corresponds more with the empirical reality and the lived experience of all Australians, where institutions are controlled not by ‘Anglo-Celts’ but by white Australians (see Hage 1998). Thus, concerning ‘lived experience’, it is important to go beyond policy statements to the empirical realm of the individuals involved. As we saw with the tension between multiculturalism as policy and multiculturalism as practice, statements about the nature of government policy shifts in favour of Aboriginal interests are not a good measure of the development of Aborigine–white relations. Hence, we would challenge the explanatory capacity of Kane’s optimistic comment that

Australian governments have been committed for some years to the repudiation of the institutional racialism which characterised the nation’s past, most notoriously in the immigration laws known as the ‘White Australia’ policy. Measures such as ending racial discrimination in immigration in the early 1970s, the passage of the *Racial Discrimination Act* in 1975 and various Aboriginal land rights acts, and the legislation with respect to native title and social justice for Aborigines that arose out of the High Court’s *Mabo* case, attest to the strength of this commitment. [Kane 1997:117–18; see also Stokes 1997a:168]

To be clear, we are not saying that racialism, or the more familiar term, racism, does not exist: indeed it does, although these terms are often lacking in

conceptual clarity. Briefly, both terms apply to that type of belief or behaviour that incorrectly imputes some known social attribute (for example, low retention levels at school) to be a result of a biological attribute (for example, having black skin). We are not necessarily saying that domination is the same as racialism, although they are closely related. The more important point is that at the everyday level the vast majority of Aborigines are integrated into white-controlled institutional life, such as the world of work, health care and education. Even unemployed Aborigines dependent on government benefits are an instance of this integration. Finally, as a comment on the Mabo outcome (*Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)* (1992) 175 CLR 1), it needs to be remembered that it was the High Court of Australia, as a white-controlled entity within the wider institution of the law, that made the decision.

Institutional integration is an important process, for it means that Aboriginal people acquire many of the same expectations, values and standards as the wider, white population. This process is varied and does not necessarily entail a shedding of Aboriginal cultural traits. But, to the extent that Aborigines use the English language and acquire white expectations, values and standards, we are identifying not merely what they think about but that with which they think. In other words, we are identifying their taken-for-granted acceptance of the social world that goes beyond the language employed and the content of their thinking to the given nature of that world. Moreover, in terms of the focus of this book, Aborigines' adoption of white standards in a white-controlled social world is illustrative of their unequal capacity to define social knowledge from which individuals are able to construct their identities. This point is closely related to Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic power': 'the power to make things with words' depends on the degree to which it is 'founded in reality' (quoted in Stokes 1997b:10). Perhaps symbolic power is the key element when it comes to examination of so-called influence of migrants and Aborigines on Australian institutional life. Jupp (1997:141) may be correct when he notes that the

ideology and policies of multiculturalism have created a public space for cultural diversity in official conceptions of Australian identity where none had existed before [and, further, that] [t]here is little question that the agenda in Australian public debate is still controlled by the native-born and British-derived majority. Multicultural, immigration and Aboriginal policy are almost the only areas in which this is not the case.

He *may* be correct for two reasons. First, Jupp's use of the word 'almost' is not clear and leaves open the possibility that the agenda in public debate is controlled by white Australians, but only just, or that there is doubt about who controls the agenda. Second, Jupp may have a point when it comes to the public

agenda, because he is talking about the level of statements of principle: they do not touch the more important practical issue of the everyday control of key Australian institutions.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have demonstrated how self-identity, in this case migrant and Aboriginal cultural identity, is implicated in an understanding of social inequality (see also chapters 8, 9 and 10). An important insight was that cultural identity, whether as ethnicity or Aboriginality, is closely linked to other structural domains, such as class, power relations and political processes. These links mean that cultural identity cannot be invoked at will but is often dependent on structural conditions that act as constraints on that identity. We have shown that cultural identity is related to inequality in several ways.

First, similar to the situation concerning social resources in the previous chapter, migrants' and Aborigines' perpetuations of their cultural identities help explain the maintenance of patterns of inequality. In the case of migrants, the ethnic mobility trap demonstrates that the more they elevate their own cultural distinctiveness, the more they prevent their attaining the highest social rewards. In the case of Aborigines, to the extent that they have internalised white conceptions of Aboriginality, these negative, defensive components of self-identity only serve to maintain Aborigines' disadvantaged place in the Australian opportunity structure. At the same time, recognition of a relationship between the more robust expressions of cultural identity, the structural circumstances in which they are immersed, and high levels of disadvantage in terms of inequality of life chances, means that inclusion of cultural identity assists in identification of inequality by acting as a tentative guidepost to and predictor of its location.

Second, the situation of Aborigines not having equal capacity to define social knowledge about themselves represents another form of inequality that exists over and above that surrounding life chances. Third, the empirical reality in which migrants and Aborigines are immersed helps our analysis of policy statements and other written sources, especially through the identification of errors, limitations and inconsistencies. Such enhanced analysis also prompts caution when approaching this type of written material. Finally, throughout this chapter we have deliberately chosen to give prominence to the more umbrella term *cultural identity* rather than resort exclusively to the usual terminology of *ethnicity* and *Aboriginality*. Our motive was to heighten awareness of migrant and Aboriginal identities as examples of a wide range of identities, most of which do not have the media publicity and government

support that our examples attract. If we think of culture as patterns of consciousness surrounding individuals' ways of seeing and being in the world (Shearing and Ericson 1991), then there are other cultural realms, such as religion and sport, that could be analysed in terms of their hierarchies and patterns of domination. Such recognition, in addition, prompts scrutiny of the issue of government recognition and support for particular cultural domains, such as ethnicity, which Theophanous (1995:248) suggests allows domination by particular cultural interests over other forms of pluralism (see Kukathas 1993). Specifically, this insight sensitises us to the possibility of an even wider range of cultural identities being implicated in political contexts involving similar forms of patterned inequality.

Key terms and concepts

- Self-identity
- Cultural difference
- Migrants
- Culture
- Cultural identity
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Aborigines
- Ethnic group
- Multiculturalism
- Aboriginality

Study questions

- 1 What are the problems with the way in which 'culture' has been presented by social scientists?
- 2 Why is it important to distinguish between multiculturalism as policy and multiculturalism in practice?
- 3 How is inequality linked to multiculturalism as policy and multiculturalism in practice?
- 4 In what way does the notion of Aboriginality illustrate a dimension of inequality that goes beyond inequality of life chances?
- 5 Can Aborigines' lack of capacity to define social knowledge about themselves be regarded as a form of social inequality?

Further reading

Beckett, J. (ed.). 1988. *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

This reader presents a variety of papers that focus on the historical development of Aboriginality as a social construction, especially a construction in the hands of white Australians.

Hage, Ghassan. 1998. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Sydney: Pluto Press Australia.

An intellectually provocative discussion of the importance of the white–black divide being the telling demarcation in approaching and understanding the place of indigenous people's relations in Australia.

Lewins, Frank. 1991. Theoretical and political implications of the dynamic approach to Aboriginality. *Australian Journal of Anthropology*. Special issue 2:171–8.

This paper looks at the notion of Aboriginality as a flexible concept that has largely been constructed by white Australians.

———. 2001. 'Assimilation and integration' in *The Australian People*. Edited by J. Jupp. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press. pp. 752–5.

This chapter traces the development of thinking in political, social and academic circles towards migrant settlement in Australia. In particular, it examines the shifts from the early policies of assimilation, through integration, to multiculturalism.

Lopez, Mark. 2000. *The Origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics 1945–1975*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

This reworked PhD thesis examines an extraordinary amount of material in tracing the development of the Federal Government's current policy of multiculturalism. It is based on a detailed analysis of policy documents and related sources, as well as on interviews with several of the key figures in this area.

Martin, Jean I. 1978. *The Migrant Presence*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin.

Based on an analysis of secondary and documentary materials, this book is a detailed analysis of the institutional responses to migrants in Australia up to the mid-1970s. The institutions include education and the trade unions.

Theophanous, Andrew. 1995. *Understanding Multiculturalism and Australian Identity*. Melbourne: Elikia Books.

Although a somewhat biased account of the role of politicians and political parties in the area of migrant policy and settlement, it presents a vast amount of primary source material from key figures, documents and parliamentary speeches.

7 Experiencing the Inequality of Life Choices

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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We now turn our attention to the self at the individual level and, therefore, adopt a more micro approach than the previous two chapters, which are more concerned with wider social categories and groups. In this chapter we relate the broad **postmodernist** approach to the self and **self-identity** to recent insights on gender. Our inclusion of the postmodernist stance is principally because of its claim that individuals have often unrealised capacities to choose their own identities and priorities. To the extent that this claim is true, it means that individuals have some control over inequality in that they can shape and control areas of their lives, such as life chances. Rather than celebrating the postmodernists' new individualism, we challenge their stance on empirical grounds and demonstrate that the optimistic picture conveyed by the postmodernist 'reading' of **gender** involves less freedom of individual choice than is claimed. By linking theory, self-experience and empirical reality, we identify a number of limitations of earlier work on gender and inequality. Those limita-

tions, particularly in terms of inequality, are largely concerned with the failure to recognise that the barriers to individual choice are structured. These **structural constraints** occur in a systematic and patterned way and represent a different manifestation of social inequality.

Drawing on recent Australian empirical research, we employ the concept of gender using the empirical example of transsexualism. A focus on **transsexuals** is useful for at least two reasons. First, transsexuals are often celebrated as exemplars of the triumph of individuals' subjective choice (see Garber 1993). Second, there are increasing numbers of socially visible transsexuals and a growing literature on this topic. Put differently, they are an empirical phenomenon: they exist. We begin this task by first exploring some of the problems associated with the concept of gender and its earlier use in the understanding of inequality.

The problem with gender

Gender is often defined as the social organisation of **biological sex** differences or, as Eisenstein (1988:81) puts it, 'Sex is the realm of biological raw material, and gender reflects human social intervention' (see chapter 4). In most societies, biological *males* and *females* are seen as, and see themselves as, *men* and *women*. It is, however, often pointed out in the sociological literature that there is anything but a straightforward link between sex and gender, or between *biological* endowment and *social* patterns. The universal and given nature of those endowments (for example, sex-specific genitalia, chromosomes) is associated with immense cross-cultural variation of what it means to be a man and a woman (see, for example, Connell 1987; Kessler and McKenna 1985). Despite the obvious difference in what is separately conveyed by the concepts of sex and gender, gender remains one of the most abused concepts in social science. The abuse stems from the persistent application of a concept lacking precise meaning and critical scrutiny of how it is applied. Sociologists, having successfully established that biological sex needs to be distinguished from gender, have gone on to make the mistake of reifying gender. As we demonstrate below, gender is an accomplishment rather than a fixed identity or category.

In the broad social-science literature, the varying relationships between sex and gender can be organised into four categories (Connell 1987; Lewins 1995:30–1):

- sex determines gender;
- sex and gender are additive;
- gender is the only important concept: sex is irrelevant; and
- gender determines sex.

This list is not the complete range of logical possibilities. One could claim, for example, that only sex exists: there is no gender, and sex and gender are the same thing. The former was the case before gender emerged as an explanatory concept. If John Money, a well-known researcher in the area of sex and gender identity, is to be believed, he borrowed from philology and linguistics and introduced the term 'gender' in the 1950s (Money 1988:53). The idea that sex and gender are the same thing is more of an everyday, taken-for-granted assumption and not a dominant thread in the academic literature. Of course, this is not to say that scholarly writing is free of confusion (Kessler and McKenna 1985:7). Even well-known introductory texts, such as Ian Robertson's *Sociology*, slip into using sex and gender interchangeably. As he notes, 'Throughout history, *men* have generally been the dominant *sex*' (Robertson, I. 1987:313; emphasis added).

The third option, that sex determines gender, has been the dominant assumption in the academic literature. As Kessler and McKenna (1985:viii) stress, 'it has been generally taken for granted that *fundamentally* gender is a consequence of a biological blueprint' (emphasis in original). The Australian sociologist Connell (1987:67–8) is also critical of this dominant, biological reductionist assumption. Identifying the erroneous and pervasive idea that 'society registers what nature decrees', Connell criticises Desmond Morris's assumption in *The Naked Ape* (1967) that 'it is the biological nature of the beast that has moulded the social structure of civilisation, rather than the other way around'.

Another approach emphasising the consequences of 'natural difference' when it comes to the relationship between sex and gender is the notion that society and nature are additive. This means that natural differences between males and females are insufficient to account for the complexity of social differentiation. 'Society therefore *culturally elaborates* the distinction between the sexes' by stressing, for instance, the distinctiveness of men's and women's clothing, which emphasises their distinctive bodies (Connell 1987:73; emphasis in original). Connell, however, wants to make the point that in this additive conception of sex and gender, the social is often emphasised to the point of not giving any significance to the empirical reality of certain biological events in our lives, such as pleasure, pain and body contact (Connell 1987:74–5; see also Gatens 1983). This same response could be applied to the third option, that gender is paramount and that sex differences are irrelevant. The early second-wave feminists, for instance, 'implied that all sex differences are socially produced' (Connell 1987:67), which is akin to saying that only the concept of gender is necessary for analysis because it incorporates all facets of social construction.

The final option – that gender determines sex – arises through the work of Garber (1993) and Kessler and McKenna (1985). This causal picture, however,

cannot be taken at face value. It is not saying that the ways in which societies structure what it is to be men and women cause the biological attributes of maleness and femaleness to come into existence. Obviously, this interpretation is absurd. What it is saying is that the existence of socially constructed genders leads to the recognition of biological sex differences and the attribution of their causal role in shaping gender (see Eisenstein 1988). Kessler and McKenna express the same point succinctly:

Scientists construct dimorphism where there is continuity. Hormones, behavior, physical characteristics, developmental processes, chromosomes, psychological qualities have all been fitted into gender dichotomous categories ... Biological, psychological, and social differences do not lead to our seeing two genders. Our seeing two genders leads to the 'discovery' of biological, psychological, and social differences. [Kessler and McKenna 1985:163]

Connell (1987:72–3) also makes the same point when referring to the 'mirror structure'; that is, something that mirrors 'familiar social arrangements', such as the gender dichotomy, as if 'required by nature' (see also chapter 4, this volume).

For our purposes, the third and fourth options concerning the relation between sex and gender are of the one kind. They both deny the proposition that gender *necessarily* depends on sex or is *essentially* related to biological sex. Furthermore, this view all but eliminates, or totally denies, *any* influence of sex in relation to gender, and has considerable currency in postmodernist circles. One of its more articulate proponents is Marjorie Garber, whose book *Vested Interests* (1993) provocatively analyses gender in the context of transsexualism and cross-dressing. In questioning whether biology has any role in the construction of gender, she asks:

if the story of transsexualism is not about sex at all, is it about subjectivity, specifically 'male subjectivity'? Does subjectivity follow the knife, or guide it? If a 'woman trapped in a man's body' is 'really' a woman, and a 'man trapped in a woman's body' is 'really' a man, what is the force of that 'really'? [Garber 1993:109]

Garber implies that subjectivity rather than biology or nature is the essential element in gender, a claim made more explicit when she notes that

the phenomenon of transsexualism is both a confirmation of the construction of gender and a secondary recourse to essentialism – or, to put it a slightly different way, transsexualism demonstrates that essentialism *is* cultural construction. [Garber 1993:109; emphasis in original]

At this point it might seem that our discussion of gender has little to do with life choices and even less to do with social inequality. The links will become clearer below, especially in the discussion of postmodernist understandings of

the self. For the moment, though, we want to underline or single out a few key threads and questions that will be discussed more fully below:

- The idea that gender is socially constructed means that it is more fruitful to view it as a process rather than a fixed category.
- If the construction of gender is contingent more on individual subjectivity than biological sex, then this represents another facet of self-identity and agency.
- If the construction of gender is contingent on individual subjectivity, then this, as we will see shortly, appears to support postmodernist insights celebrating the liberation of the autonomous self.
- At the same time, though, these insights raise questions about the independence of gender: Is it totally unaffected by outside constraints such as biological sex?
- How might such constraints affect self-identity and represent a form of social inequality?

Earlier understandings of gender and inequality

Having conveyed a glimpse of the nature of the concept of gender, and before looking more closely at the nature of the self in the context of postmodernist thinking, it is worth having a brief retrospective to see how gender has been theorised in relation to inequality. In general texts and more specialised studies of gender inequality the most common theme is inequality in the home and workplace. On closer observation, despite the use of the *term* 'gender', these analyses are really employing the *concept* of sex. Broom, Bonjean and Broom (1990:298), for example, talk of a 'system of *gender* stratification in which socio-economic resources and political power are distributed on the basis of *male* dominance and *female* subordination' (emphasis added). Similarly, more specialised studies of inequality, such as Western (1983), treat gender as a synonym for sex. There are frequent references to 'men' and 'women' in the text accompanied by tables referring to 'males' and 'females' (see, for example, Western 1983:148, 149, 155). Again, sex rather than gender is the focus, where 'men' and 'women' are proxies for the straightforward dichotomy of biological males and females.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that there is necessarily a problem in analyses of inequality using the concept of sex, such as in studies of the sexual division of labour. What we are saying is that sex is not a synonym for gender, and the use of these concepts in attempting to explain inequality leads to two different types of understanding. If gender is the focus, it cannot be treated as

a given. As a socially constructed identity, gender is more contingent on social contexts, has varying manifestations and is thus more fluid. As the literature above demonstrates, when sex is the focus, it has more of a given quality; that is, a taken-for-granted dichotomous category that is not problematical to determine. As we will see below, our deliberate focus on the concept of gender provides another illustration of the different way of seeing inequality where there is a conscious attempt to examine the empirical reality of transsexuals in relation to sociological theory (the critical approach to the concept of gender) and self-experience (the nature of their identities and experience). Before turning to the empirical realm, however, we want to make more clear the nature of the theoretical context in which the sociology of the self is located (see 'Postmodernist understandings of the self', page 144).

The empirical reality: Gender and transsexualism

It is important to scrutinise some of the claims about the fluidity of gender identity made in postmodernist social theory. As we have frequently pointed out, the grounding of the examination of social inequality must have a stake in the empirical realm, and we intend to use the phenomenon of transsexualism as the principal empirical referent in this section. Transsexuals are more interested in the notions of maleness, femaleness, masculine and feminine than people who are not transsexual. They are more conscious of the notions of sex, gender and gender identity than the wider public, and avoid adopting 'unisex' or androgynous styles. Their approach to and use of more conventional understandings of gender and gender identity mean they are both a lens and a vehicle that enable a clearer view of the wider dynamic of gender (Lewins 1995).

In our challenge of certain claims about the nature of gender in a postmodernist framework it is clear that, although choice is exercised when a transsexual makes the transition to living in another gender, this choice is subject to structural constraints. Put differently, by examining the empirical realm more closely, the relationship between self-identity, choice and gender fluidity does not correspond to the picture conveyed by postmodernists. We will see that gender identity is not merely 'a freely chosen game, a theatrical presentation of the self, in which one is able to present oneself in a variety of roles, images and activities' (Kellner 1992:158). More to the point, these structural constraints are closely related to less obvious forms of inequality that exist alongside the inequality of more material factors affecting life chances. These constraints are outlined in the following section, where their implications for inequality are identified. They are wide-ranging and cover areas such as the factors influencing 'doing gender',

Postmodernist understandings of the self

The postmodernist approach to the self has a number of important distinguishing marks. Explicit are the celebration of 'personal dispositions', 'intimacy' and 'pure relationships', and an emphasis on the explanatory power of 'the self'. It is in this sense that Giddens (1991:1–34) regards it as a 'reflexive project' and recognises the previous strictures on its liberation in the form of structured social knowledge and social control. On this picture, it is worth quoting Giddens (1991:5; see also 1992b) at length:

In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self ... takes place in the context of multiple choice ... [and] because of the 'openness' of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and diversity of 'authorities', lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity.

In this analysis the individual has greater capacity to exercise choice, which is also celebrated. However, it implicitly overlooks the structured nature of the empirical reality in which individuals are immersed. The postmodernist celebration of the liberated, autonomous self is accompanied by a silence concerning the structural constraints on the limits of choice or agency (see also chapter 4). As the latter is directly related to forms of inequality that hitherto have not attracted a great deal of scholarly attention, it is important briefly to outline how the postmodernist understanding of the self might be related to the concept of gender.

Postmodernism, that 'bundle of new approaches ... which reject traditional forms of general theory ... as invalid' (Bradley 1996:2), focuses more on the diversity of social experience and its local contexts. Drawing particularly on the work of Derrida, Lacan and Foucault, postmodernists have denied the existence of broad, homogenous categories, such as 'man', 'woman', and 'class' and, consequently, have turned away from an analysis of social structures, particularly their constraining capacity. Instead, they emphasise the explanatory importance of the diversity of individuals' social meanings and the way they are embedded in the plurality of particular local contexts or cultures. This new approach to social reality characterised by 'dynamic pluralism', as Lovibond (1990) puts it, plays down the importance of social inequality and elevates the explanatory significance of the self or self-identity. Applied to 'class differences', for example, it is as if class is about 'lifestyle choice'. In the postmodernist approach, there appear to be few constraints to individual choice of gender, so long as one throws off certain 'foundationalist' and 'totalizing' theoretical constraints. Bradley is worth quoting at length. As she notes, the postmodernist approach

does not necessarily imply an abandonment of the study of class, gender and ethnicity, since at the very least they can be studied as examples of discourses or of social constructs. But postmodern approaches sit uneasily with the study of material factors such as inequality and deprivation, and those influenced by the ideas of postmodernism have tended to avoid these topics. Indeed, it is not quite clear whether such study can legitimately be carried out, certainly within existing frameworks, since postmodernism opposes itself to 'foundationalist' accounts of society (that is, accounts which seek to identify the bases or underlying structures upon which society is founded and which generate specific pat-

terms of social behaviour), and to 'totalizing' narratives about society. Marx's analysis of the way in which economic relations form the 'base' on which the whole superstructure of society depends is a classic example of a foundationalist and totalizing theory. Postmodernist theorists would identify the theories both of capitalism and of patriarchy as examples of foundationalist thinking, a position which seriously undermines classic approaches to class and gender. [Bradley 1996:3]

If we apply the postmodernist approach to gender, then the widespread assumption that its construction is necessarily contingent on individuals' biological sex would be foundationalist and totalising. This is because of the underlying, pervasive and taken-for-granted assumption of a homogenous dichotomy that all males are men and all females are women. As we have seen, however, the stance adopted by Garber on transsexualism asserts that there are no foundationalist and totalising bases to gender: the only essentialism is cultural construction, which in this case is the exercise of individual subjectivity. Thus, to the extent that gender is independent of the influence of biological sex, we have grounds for a celebration of the autonomous self and the role of agency. On the other hand, to the extent that gender is constrained by biological sex, we need to modify our optimism concerning agency or individuals' capacities to choose their own identities. Caught between these possibilities, as we shall see, is the issue of inequality. In other words, drawing on the linked or 'triangulated' elements in our holistic model, our understanding of gender and inequality (theory) is directly related to the extent to which individuals' choices of gender identities (self-experience) are limited by factors stemming from biological sex (empirical reality).

physical characteristics, the link between gender, sex and **sexual orientation**, gender socialisation, and the role of history.

The factors influencing 'doing gender'

As we have already suggested, gender is more fruitfully regarded as a process rather than a category based on an individual's genitalia. The notion of gender being a property of individuals that is attained and constantly maintained implies the notion of 'doing' gender, and that this process is problematical. It is problematical because for transsexuals to maintain their own identities as 'men' and 'women', it is important that others 'attribute' the appropriate gender to them. Given the taken-for-granted view of gender in the wider social arena – that there are two genders that are natural and immutable, where males are men and females are women – people *known* to be transsexuals represent a violation of this assumption. Transsexuals presenting themselves successfully as men and women, without violating the public's taken-for-granted view, is a precarious process that constantly has to be negotiated. For anyone who is a scholar of gender or who has some familiarity with transsexualism, these

claims about gender may be fairly clear. What is less clear are the factors accounting for why some individuals 'do' gender better than others.

Lewins's (1995) empirical research identifies four key factors that influence the success of male-to-female transsexuals attaining and maintaining their gender identity in the public realm: the confident presentation of self as a 'woman' or 'man'; the nature of key body characteristics; the clothes one wears; and the company one keeps. The confident presentation of self as a 'woman' is clearly the most important factor. It has nothing to do with 'looking' like a woman but, instead, involves confidently 'being' a woman in everyday social situations, such as shopping and talking to acquaintances. In these situations, 'small behaviours' or characteristic mannerisms and gestures serve as gender cues, provided they are carried out confidently. An aspect of confident behaviour is the individual transsexual's skill in recognising, possibly at a non-conscious level, that the public's perception of gender-coded behaviour is taken for granted. Male-to-female transsexuals provide abundant examples of their uncomfortable, unconfident presentation of themselves as women leading to disruption of the public's taken-for-granted approach to gender.

The secondary factors of body characteristics, clothes and the company one keeps are related more to appearances than to situations involving actual interaction. Body characteristics include the appropriate negotiation of gender markers, such as facial hair, voice, length of hair and breast development, as well as broader physical characteristics, such as height, weight and complexion. The latter will be dealt with separately below. Facial hair and breast development have immense importance as gender cues. For male-to-female transsexuals, the *absence* of facial hair and the *appearance* of breast development, whether through breast augmentation surgery or simple 'padding', are crucial. Not surprisingly, for female to male transsexuals, the *presence* of a beard and the *non-appearance* of breast development, either surgically or through 'strapping', are equally crucial. Clothes are important in doing gender, as well as in violation of the attribution of gender, in two ways. First, as one might expect, their gendered nature provides strong cues in attributing gender. Only women, for example, wear dresses. Second, wearing inappropriate clothes in particular settings invites public scrutiny and upsets the taken-for-granted nature of gender. As one of Lewins's (1995:118) respondents put it, 'If you wear a cocktail dress down to the corner store at 10am to get a carton of milk, then you're inviting prying looks'. Similar scrutiny of one's gender can stem from the company one keeps. Irrespective of the successful presentation of self as either a man or a woman, the nature of the body and the clothes worn, being seen in the company of transsexuals who attract public scrutiny because of their ambiguous gendered behaviour can lead to someone's gender being 'suspect'.

This brief discussion of transsexuals doing gender sits uneasily beside the picture outlined by postmodernists; that is, where individuals choose and easily adopt new identities. Transsexuals' constant concern for doing gender well, for not attracting public gaze, and at the same time being aware of a range of uncomfortable situations involving violation of the taken-for-grantedness of their gender, suggest that their new gender identities may have been chosen but are not easy to maintain. The difficulty of negotiating the patterned assumptions surrounding appropriate gendered behaviour and appearance, and the social distancing of transsexuals represent structural limitations to the fluidity of choice of gender identity. To this point there is not much we can say about these structural limitations in relation to inequality, apart from the fact that some transsexuals 'do' gender better than others. In the following discussion, however, structured inequality is more prominent and explicit.

Physical characteristics

As noted above, broad physical characteristics, such as height, weight and complexion, impinge on gender identity in structured ways that are determinative of less obvious forms of inequality. Age is a proxy for these characteristics, especially among male-to-female transsexuals. As Lewins (1995) found, those in their teens presented confidently as women, largely because their bodies closely resembled the female form, especially if they had been taking female hormones. Older transsexuals who had lived as men had more reservations about their physical appearance and their capacity to present confidently as women in public. Generally, these transsexuals' views of themselves as women could be measured by their distance from a shared view of feminine beauty. The under-representation of tall, heavy and hairy men from Lewins's sample of interviewees raises the question of whether their physical characteristics were perceived to be too distant from the minimum physical image required to live as women and, consequently, they remained socially invisible. This question is seriously raised because of the numbers involved in Lewins's audit of all transsexuals associated with the Gender Dysphoria Clinic at the Monash Medical Centre up to the early 1990s. Examining the files of 200 male-to-female referrals, Lewins found that the proportion of Australian-born transsexuals corresponded with the proportion of Australian-born males in the wider population (about 75 per cent). By contrast, referrals from non-English-speaking countries were heavily under-represented. Whereas just over 13 per cent of males in the Australian population were born in non-English-speaking countries, only a little over 5 per cent of Lewins's interviewees and just over 4 per cent of all transsexuals who had had sex-reassignment surgery were born in

non-English-speaking countries (Lewins 1995:11). Given the large numbers of migrants in Australia from Italy, Greece and Lebanon, for example, their absence from the ranks of transsexuals in Lewins's research seems to suggest a negative relationship between Mediterranean physical characteristics and the ease of exercising a choice to live in one's preferred gender. Of course, in making these comments we acknowledge that there may also be cultural characteristics that inhibit individuals' decisions to make a gender transition.

To the extent that physical characteristics shape individual gender identity, whether it be those mutable characteristics that accompany age or those associated with extremes of weight and height and geographical region (for example, Mediterranean), it demonstrates again the factors beyond individual choice that impinge on the everyday attainment and maintenance of gender identity. Again the situation is anything but a fluid shift from one identity to another following the exercise of choice. Instead, it is an instance of structured inequality where, because of age or because of overall body type, some individuals are more capable than others in exercising a choice and living in their preferred gender. In this situation, to put it more explicitly, individuals' capacities to choose their gender are *unequal*.

The links between gender, sex and sexual orientation

From the variety of relationships that various scholars have posited between biological sex and gender, there are two important points that enable us to identify another realm of structural properties constraining the fluidity or freedom of choice concerning an individual's adoption – or rejection – of his or her gender identity. The first point is that the phenomenon of transsexualism demonstrates empirically that sex and gender are not the same thing. The second point is that in saying sex and gender are *separate* concepts, it is not to say they are *separated*. As we have seen, the efforts of some social scientists to deny a 'biology is destiny' view of gender could lead to the alternative view that gender is not influenced *in any way* by biological sex. We suggest that gender is not totally independent of sex. It is influenced in structured ways along with sexual orientation. The latter refers to whether an individual sees him or herself as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual, although it should be noted that we do not see these categories as the only way of characterising the diversity of sexual orientation. They are used here because, as Lewins discovered among his interviewees, they were the categories generally used by transsexuals to describe their own orientation (Lewins 1995:110–43). Hence, we are suggesting that gender, sex and sexual orientation are three points of a triangle, conceptually separate for analytical purposes, but not able to be sepa-

rated empirically. In terms of our holistic approach, this means that the empirical reality on which we draw must consider aspects of gender, sex and sexual orientation.

Turning to the relationships between sex, gender and sexual orientation, the situation of transsexuals helps our identification of the relationships between these three domains in the wider society that is largely at the non-conscious level. Transsexuals' accounts of 'mistaken identity' illuminate the complexity of these relationships. Lewins (1995:38) captures this point by noting that

when we desire someone and it is reciprocated, the positive nature of continuing interaction reaffirms and, possibly for some, confirms their gender identity. A male who is a masculine heterosexual man may desire a female who is a feminine heterosexual woman. If that desire is reciprocated and continues to be reciprocated, it signals to both that they see each other in much the same way as they expect to be seen. On the other hand, if a male who is a masculine homosexual man desires another male he perceives to be an effeminate homosexual man, then that desire may be reciprocated momentarily because the latter may be a male to female transsexual who sees herself as a heterosexual feminine woman. Once she realises that the other person sees her as an effeminate man rather than a feminine woman, the desire and interaction become problematical and cannot continue without one or both redefining their gender.

The point we have been making is that individuals cannot simply redefine their gender because of the constraints attached to the linkages gender has with sex and sexual orientation. We see the linkages in the situation above, where sexual attraction is reciprocated. Initially, attraction involves assumptions based on outward appearances (for example, he looks like a *male* and therefore must be a *man*). If the attraction is reciprocated, those assumptions are extended (for example, he sees me as a *heterosexual woman*, who is attracted to him as a *heterosexual man*) and again (for example, given our mutual attraction, I expect him to have a *male body* and he expects me to have a *female body*). Especially revealing among transsexuals, who, it must be remembered, are people who think a lot about issues to do with the lack of a necessary or even a determinative relationship between sex and gender, is the largely non-conscious assumption that if one knows one is a woman or a man, then one should have the body that *corresponds* with one's gender. In other words, a transsexual may be a biological male (or female), but if that person sees herself (himself) as a woman (man), then she (he) should have a female (male) body. As Lewins points out, this structured assumption among transsexuals in his research was both universal and taken for granted (Lewins 1995:122–32).

In terms of how the relationships between sex, gender and sexual orientation are, in turn, related to the issue of social inequality, there is a lengthy discussion we could undertake on transsexuals' equality before the law. For

people who make life choices about their gender identity, the patterned constraints affecting their lives exist at the wider social level. Although legal reform has resulted in ease of changing details of sex and gender on documents such as passports and birth certificates, this reform has not extended to marriage. Transsexuals, along with gay and lesbian people, do not have equality with heterosexuals in the wider society when it comes to their turning a sociological marriage into a legal marriage. In other words, they cannot legally marry anyone from their pool of potential marriage partners. This is because legal marriage is predicated on biology rather than gender, in that people who marry must be of *different* sex (see Lewins 1995:138–9).

Gender socialisation

Recent research on a comparison of male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals (Lewins 2002) reveals another dimension of gender that illuminates wider structural influences and their implications for social inequality. In demonstrating that a number of assumed differences between male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals are not supported by evidence, Lewins points to one difference that remains unchallenged – the greater capacity of female-to-male transsexuals to attain and maintain stable partnerships. This capacity is, at face value, unusual in the light of an apparent contradiction. Given that sex-reassignment surgery for MTFs offers a closer approximation of the desired genitalia than it does for FTMs, the latter have more stable relationships ‘in spite of unfavourable anatomical conditions’ (Kockott and Fahrner 1988:544).

Lewins’s argument is that the capacity to maintain stable partnerships is linked to gender socialisation. Being socialised as a girl and then a woman elevates the importance of affective ties in partnerships, such as bonding and caring. By contrast, being socialised as a boy and then a man places more importance on the role of physical characteristics of the man and his partner in attaining and maintaining partnerships. More specifically, Lewins shows that the likelihood of transsexuals having stable relationships is related to their gender of socialisation and that of their partners. The highest proportion of stable relationships was among heterosexual FTMs. Next were lesbian MTFs followed by heterosexual MTFs. This rank order does not explain anything, but when transsexuals’ gender of early socialisation is considered alongside that of their partners, there is a gradation from both individuals being socialised as girls/women, through one socialised as a boy/man and one as a girl/woman, to both being socialised as boys/men. On the assumption that the early socialisation of boys/men is different from that for girls/women and that the legacy of their socialisation is not easily discarded, the observed gradation suggests that

there is a direct relation between both transsexuals and their partners being socialised as girls/women and the stability of their relationships. Of course, the converse also applies in that instability of relationships increases when one and then both individuals are socialised as boys/men.

Lewins argues that there is a distinctive feature in the process of gender socialisation that explains transsexuals' varying capacity to maintain stable relationships. This feature, as we shall see, is also determinative of a form of structured inequality. The distinctive socialisation of boys/men is that expressive qualities, such as caring, have little importance, whereas bodily appearance assumes great importance in attaining and maintaining sexual relationships. The latter value applies not only to men's own bodily appearance, but also extends to that of their partners. This claim concerning the greater role of bodily appearance for men in attaining and maintaining sexual relationships is consistent with wider research on the nature of masculinity and femininity. It is frequently pointed out, for example, that in many societies physical attractiveness is regarded as more appropriate for assessing women than men (see Graziano et al. 1993; Moghaddam 1998:285–9; Williams, S. 1997). What is often overlooked in these commentaries is the importance of physical attractiveness in relation to men. It is men as *beholders* of women's physical attractiveness, combined with the claim that it is they who have defined the criteria by which women *and* men will be assessed (Unger and Crawford 1996), that support the claim above concerning the importance of bodily appearance for men.

It is thus a reasonable inference that FTMs' relationships with women are more likely to be stable because both parties were socialised as girls and then as women. Because women value, more than do men, the expressive properties of relationships and, correspondingly, place less stress on the importance of physical qualities, this wider pattern helps to explain the, arguably, counter-predictive nature of FTMs' more successful relationships.

The significance of the role of early socialisation as a boy/man and as a girl/woman demonstrates the location of transsexuals in a wider social context. In terms of conducting relationships, the relative disadvantage of heterosexual male-to-female transsexuals is a subtle form of structured inequality linked to that social context. Put differently, MTFs and FTMs are not equal in their capacity to attain and maintain close relationships.

The role of history

The final area linking gender identity, wider structural factors and social inequality is the domain of history. To the extent that transsexuals demonstrate that individuals can exercise *some* choice over their gender identity, it needs to

be borne in mind that this event is historically specific to modernity; that is, the period following the Industrial Revolution. We want to make clear what we mean by this statement. We are not saying that transsexuals, or rather their counterparts, did not exist in feudal times or earlier (see Bullough 1976a, 1976b; cf. Hausman 1995). What we are saying is that transsexuals were socially invisible because they had no legitimate social space. This situation has changed, where today the medicalisation of transsexualism means that not only is it given a name and is 'treated' in gender clinics, but also that there is the provision of sophisticated technology in the form of hormone therapy and surgery to assist the successful transition to living in another gender. Further, although there is some distance to go in terms of wider public acceptance of transsexuals, they are largely no longer regarded as belonging in the realms of the freakish and bizarre (Walters and Ross 1986:ix).

The distinctive feature of modernity that is important for understanding the extent of transsexuals' choices of gender identity is the freeing of the individual from the family as a social unit of survival. Before the Industrial Revolution, families in an agricultural mode of production were more conscious of the relationship between their labour and survival. The historical significance of the value of having sons can be linked to this predicament. Furthermore, this structural location of the family also shaped arrangements surrounding reproduction, such as who could marry whom, proscriptions against adultery and incest, and the valuing of virginity. Arguably, the closer communities were to the margins of survival, the greater the social controls surrounding reproduction. From this situation emerged a taken-for-granted acceptance of the heterosexual male/man–female/woman dichotomy and a marginalisation of identities that would threaten survival, such as people who saw themselves as the counterpart of today's transsexuals and homosexuals (see D'Emilio 1983; Gough 1975; Lewins 1995:150–3; Turner, B. 1984, 1991).

The lessening of the importance of the family for survival has meant that the structural constraints that marginalised transsexuals have weakened. With the weakening of the given nature or naturalness of the heterosexual male/man–female/woman dichotomy, as indicated by increasing numbers of people not marrying and an increasing number of married people choosing not to have children, there is increasing public discussion of issues that were unthinkable even a few decades ago, issues such as homosexual marriage and male pregnancy.

Increasing social visibility and legitimacy of transsexuals and the availability of surgical and endocrinal technology that enhance physical appearance have allowed more transsexuals to live in the gender of their choosing. Today, the extent to which they have some choice as to their gender identity, complemented by gender clinics providing surgical and endocrinal technology, means

that they are advantaged in relation to their earlier, historical counterparts. In other words, one's location at a particular moment in history represents another form of structured inequality. Such inequality exists at two levels: the historical inequality of an individual's capacity to recognise at the conscious level the nature of the desired identity, and the inequality of the social conditions to realise that identity. This recognition of a type of historical inequality represents an understanding (theory) that emerges only by linking the increasing visibility over time of transsexuals' self-identities (self-experience) and the evidence of their locations at different points in history (empirical reality).

Conclusion

Although this chapter has focused on what might appear to be a narrow empirical domain, its insights go beyond the realm of transsexuals. At one level, transsexuals are a critical test case in that they are, arguably, individuals who are most committed to the exercise of choice in terms of their gender identity. The structural constraints they encounter represent a measure of the difficulties faced by less committed individuals pursuing a range of other identities. At another level, the situation of transsexuals provides something of a template or a basis of comparison for other committed individuals who yearn to adopt other identities. It is clear that homosexuals, for instance, face similar structural constraints, and their situation reinforces the point that sexual orientation is more than mere sexual *preference*.

The structural constraints transsexuals encounter in choosing their gender are diverse. They were identified by examining a number of areas such as the everyday task of 'doing gender'; the physical characteristics of bodies; the close links between sex, gender and sexual orientation; gender socialisation; and the historical development of modern society. Their identification represents an important contribution to our understanding of inequality. First, these constraints enable recognition of forms of inequality beyond the realm of life chances. For instance, we demonstrated the inequality of individuals' capacities to 'do gender'; the inequality of individuals' capacities to adapt their physical characteristics to correspond with their chosen genders; the inequality of the role of cultural background in influencing the decision to make a gender transition; the inequality of individuals before the law in terms of choices of marriage partners; the inequality of FTMs' and MTFs' capacities to maintain close relationships; and the inequality of opportunities for transsexuals living in different historical periods to make gender transitions.

Second, there is another important contribution of our recognition of the constraints on the choice of gender identity. In providing a strong counter to

postmodernist approaches to the self and, in conjunction with our recognition of new forms of inequality, they contribute to an understanding (theory) of inequality by incorporating the role of structure at the same time as acknowledging the role of individual choice or agency.

Third, our recognition of the role of structural constraints in limiting transsexuals' free choice of gender identity supports the proposition that the study of any instances of frustrated expressions of self-identity could assist recognition of structural constraints, which in turn may be linked to inequality. To this extent, a focus on self-experience, albeit frustrated expressions of self-identity, facilitates *identification* of new patterns of inequality.

Finally, this understanding only strengthens the claims we make concerning the value of our holistic model. By linking understanding or theory with an acknowledgement of the importance of individuals' self-experience and the empirical realm, we have an effective blueprint for the study of inequality in an even greater range of social domains than we have considered in this book.

Key terms and concepts

- Postmodernist
- Self-identity
- Gender
- Structural constraints (limitations)
- Transsexuals
- Biological sex
- Sexual orientation

Study questions

- 1 Why is gender a process (something one does) rather than a category (something one is)?
- 2 What are the structural factors that constrain the adoption of a fluid gender identity, as proposed by the postmodernists?
- 3 What does it mean to say that biological sex, gender and sexual orientation are separate but not separated?
- 4 In what ways do transsexuals' adoptions of gender identities illustrate social inequality?

Further reading

Bradley, Harriet. 1996. *Fractured Identities: Changing Patterns of Inequality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

A clear account of the way in which the idea of the self has grown in postmodernist approaches to the individual in society. There is also a critical analysis of postmodernism that touches on structural constraints and issues of inequality.

Connell, R.W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

A wide-ranging discussion of the ways gender is implicated in more macro social analysis. There is also a useful exploration of the nature of the concept of gender.

Garber, Marjorie. 1993. *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

This lengthy but readable work goes beyond cross-dressing to examine areas such as transsexualism and the analysis of the relationship between biological sex and gender. It is a useful heuristic device because it raises more questions than it answers.

Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

This work clarifies the importance of self-identity in understanding a number of facets of contemporary society. Some readers may find, as we the authors do, that there is insufficient acknowledgement of the wide range of structural constraints limiting individuals' expressions of self-identity.

Kessler, Suzanne, and Wendy McKenna. 1985. *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*. New York: John Wiley.

This account of gender is not as narrow as the title may suggest. It is not narrow ethnomethodology, nor does it dwell on the issues surrounding its empirical referent; that is, transsexuals. It contains a number of important insights on the sociological significance of gender, the principal one being that gender is a process: it is something that people do.

Lewins, Frank. 1995. *Transsexualism in Society: A Sociology of Male to Female Transsexuals*. Melbourne: Macmillan.

An empirical study of male-to-female transsexuals at the mid-range to macro and micro levels. It critically analyses the medical approach to transsexualism, and presents a number of theoretical insights that emphasise the processual and contextual nature of this phenomenon.

Part 3

**Politics, Society and
Inequality**

8 Collective Identity, Politics and the Myth of Egalitarianism

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Part 3 examines how the concepts of the body and the self relate to transformations in inequality in the Australian political realm. It is important to stress that the body and the self cannot be divorced from politics. Although the book appears to move from micro to macro elements of the experience of social change, parts 1 and 2 have demonstrated the interconnections between these realms. The personal is political. Part 1 showed how something as personal as the body is a social construct with political meaning, summed up in Foucault's concept of bio-power. Part 2, on the self, focused on how we, as individuals, identify with others in making sense of our selves.

This 'political' part of the book draws upon the previous chapters on the body and the self in order to focus more on how individuals and groups with different levels of access to socially valued resources act in and on the world to attain given ends. This often involves resisting patterns of inequality, such as

exploitative forms of industrial relations, questioning patriarchy or arguing for increased resources for language teaching and training. They can also draw together the more intimate aspects of our lives with broader, more abstract structures of power, such as abortion rights, the preservation of a green belt or resistance to the building of a fast-food outlet in a neighbourhood. Politics is where the perception of inequality crosses over into collective action aimed at changing (or preserving) the existing allocation of social resources, including power.

This chapter explores the circumstances surrounding the Australian experience of nation-building – or the construction of a collective identity – and its relationship to inequality. This will then serve as a foundation for chapter 9, which examines various ways in which this official presentation of national identity has been challenged over the past century. Chapter 10 will then discuss contemporary political transformations of identity and inequality.

As this chapter unfolds, it will become apparent that there have been numerous contradictions in the presentation of national self. At the time of Federation, Australia was regarded by many observers as a progressive nation leading the world community towards social and political equality. In addition, a form of **egalitarianism** was enshrined in laws that proclaimed ‘fairness’ as the basis for determining industrial and property rights. This reinforced the emerging **political myth** that egalitarianism was part of the Australian character and the national identity.

However, this myth of egalitarianism was founded on an exclusionary premise of a ‘White Man’s Australia’, and even then applied only to some white men. Indigenous Australians were denied citizenship, non-Europeans were denied entry through restrictive immigration laws, and women were denied the same industrial rights as men.

Sociologically, this term *myth* represents a cultural reference-point that people use to make sense of their surrounding social and physical world, and that helps orient their action (Williams, R. 1980:177). Myths provide organising focuses for cultures. They involve convictions ‘based not necessarily on empirical fact but on faith, a confidence impervious to the remonstrations of critical reason’ (Meisel 1962:5).

This chapter reveals the origins of this political myth of egalitarianism and examines its sustaining power from the mid-nineteenth century until the present. It also demonstrates how the construction of an Australian myth emphasising egalitarianism, equality and fairness was built on an edifice that excluded certain groups of people as outsiders. In other words, it shows how Australian politics and identity were embodied and how national identity framed the body politic.

The contemporary political relevance of inequality

The meaning of national identity lies at the heart of many contentious Australian political controversies over the past decade (Blainey 2000:238). A rolling series of interrelated debates has occupied the public mind and aroused political passion amid warnings that they threaten to ‘tear the nation apart’. These debates include:

- The question of the nation’s relationship with its colonial heritage. To what extent should Australia continue to look to its British past as an indicator of its cultural aspirations? At the end of the 1990s, this controversy reached its climax in the republican referendum that challenged whether Australia should finally break its constitutional links with Britain.
- The question of the past and current treatment of the original inhabitants of the land. Debates concerning whether Australia was ‘settled’ or ‘invaded’ are part of wider debates, such as whether the Federal Government should negotiate a treaty with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and a process of reconciliation. During the 1990s, the longstanding myth of *terra nullius* was overturned by the High Court, recognising indigenous land rights. The debate over the ‘stolen generations’ revealed the traumatic consequences of past governmental practices aimed at cultural assimilation, and highlighted to many that past attempts to forge a national identity were based partly on coercive policies.
- The question of Australia’s changing relationship with the world. Intense debate has surrounded whether the nation should orient itself towards our traditional trading partners or whether it should forge closer links with regional partners. These debates had additional importance at a time when the nation was abandoning protectionist trade barriers, and led to further considerations of the legacy of protectionism and how the nation viewed its role within the wider global community.
- The question of the relationship with other cultures, in terms of Australia’s absorption of overseas cultural influences. These questions struck at the heart of the issue of national identity. The emergence of ‘the Hanson phenomenon’ reflected divisions within Australian society over the multicultural nature of the nation and led to a concern among many people that certain sectors of the population were being ‘left behind’ by the pace of social and economic change.
- The question over the role of the state in protecting the disadvantaged, and debates over welfare rights, citizenship rights and mutual obligation. Throughout the past fifteen years the nation has been divided over the

impact of 'economic rationalism' and the relationship between the individual and the state, as state services have been rationalised, corporatised or privatised. Commentators have disagreed on the 'winners and losers' of these outcomes.

- The question of workers' rights and the share of the national cake between workers and employers, or wages and profits. As the process of state arbitration has been gradually dismantled and greater flexibility has been promoted, industrial disputes have flared over the meaning of a fair wage and the capacity of employers to compete internationally. The 1998 lockout of wharf-side workers by Patrick Stevedores was one of the most confrontational industrial disputes in postwar Australian history.

These controversies are interrelated in the sense that they can be understood as a search for a meaningful understanding between the self and the nation, as part of an ongoing search for national identity during a period of profound social transformation. They are also interrelated in the sense that they politically redefine access to social resources, and therefore reshape understandings of equality and inequality, equity and inequity, and the extent to which different individuals and different social groups are given a 'fair go'.

To understand why these debates have been so intense, it is necessary to explore how Australian culture and identity were shaped by history. One of the moments that encapsulated the historical import of these controversies over inequality and national identity occurred in the lead-up to, and the fall-out from, the 1996 elections, when Paul Keating's Labor Party lost to John Howard's Coalition. During the early to mid 1990s, Keating advocated a re-definition of Australian identity and Australia's place in the world, based on a reassessment of the past and a new vision for the future. This vision included Aboriginal reconciliation, a treaty with Aboriginal Australians and an acknowledgement of past wrongs to Indigenous Australians. It also called for a more emphatic break with Australia's colonial heritage by making Australia a republic. For Keating, the fall of Singapore in 1942 and the Kokoda Trail were more adequate symbols of Australian identity than Gallipoli. He also envisaged Australia as an integral part of the Asian region, and endorsed the movement towards multiculturalism that had received bipartisan support for more than twenty years.

The historian Geoffrey Blainey accused Keating (and one of his speechwriters, Don Watson) of writing 'black armband' history, and of being purveyors of a 'political correctness' that poured scorn and shame on a proud tradition of heroism that had forged the Australian character and Australian culture. This criticism was adopted by John Howard (1996), who claimed to stand for 'mainstream' Australians and their 'core values'. Howard stated that Australians should not become obsessed with the wrongs of the past and that they

should cherish their core traditions and the defining moments in their history. Admonishing his political opponents, he stated that:

This 'black armband' view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. I take a different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of historic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed.

Howard also accused 'black armband' historians of 'endless and agonised navel-gazing ... as part of a perpetual seminar for elite opinion about our national identity'.

In turn, Howard's opponents accused him of becoming a purveyor of 'white blindfold' history, denying past political and social discrimination. Keating (1996) responded to Howard by accusing him (and Pauline Hanson) of perpetuating a mythical past and clinging to the wreckage of social and political institutions that were obsolete and 'no longer relevant or useful'. At the core of this nostalgia was 'the loss of identity and spiritual frameworks wrought by the rolling tide of forces we wrap-up in convenient catch-alls like globalisation ...'. Watson (in Yallop 1997:5) also claimed that Howard's views 'constitute an attempt to sanitise the past', while Hall (1998:8) stated that his 'cynical political polarisation' of the past had 'blocked' the path to a better future.

Each commentator was employing a different reading of history to explain the national identity. Indeed, during the past decade there has been an intense scrutiny of 'history' among social and political commentators. However, this scrutiny has occurred amid claims that history has been 'killed', 'hijacked', 'rewritten', 'revised', attired with a 'black armband' or covered by a 'white blindfold'. Any scrutiny of history and identity is necessarily politically charged, in the sense that it deals with issues of past and contemporary inequalities in different ways to inspire different visions of the future (Davison, 2000:1–9). The controversies of the past decade demonstrate how contemporary political debates about national identity and inequality cannot be understood in isolation from our sense of culture and history. We will return to these debates in chapter 10. However, before this, it is necessary to explore the history of Australia's identity politics.

Inequality and national identity

Issues of national identity take on added significance in 'immigrant countries' such as the United States, New Zealand, Canada, certain Latin American countries, Israel and Australia (Castles, S. 1987:2). These immigrant cultures share

a number of identity concerns. Migrants always bring with them a socially contextualised understanding of the past, a sense of a break with their familiar cultural milieu and therefore a sense of displacement. However, Australia and these other immigrant countries are also lands of displacement in another sense. Migration was premised on the displacement of indigenous populations. There is thus a double sense of displacement – or a lost past – for migrant and indigenous peoples (Pettman 1992:1). Displacement meant not only a break from the past, but also a sense of a new beginning involving the construction of a new identity in an unfamiliar landscape. This is the stuff of nation-building.

A *nation* is here defined as a community of people sharing a defined political or geographic territory, unified by common language, culture or tradition. Nationalists search for community origins that bind a group together against outsiders and make those insiders distinct, unique and part of a shared heritage. Despite the fact that many nationalists construct a history of their nation, race or ethnicity that appeals to a prerecorded time and presents the nation as primordial, ‘the nation’ is not some natural or presocial construct (see chapter 6).

This intellectual process of creating a shared past is what Anderson (1983) has called ‘imagined communities’. The concept of the nation as an imagined community is employed to suggest a sense of belonging to a collectivity, under conditions where people have only impersonal ties with each other. Linking nationality with tradition reinforces this impersonal shared belonging. Thus, the claim is often made that people know they have a shared ancient national heritage going back to antiquity because they share the same traditional practices and mores. However, the idea of tradition can be as socially constructed as our sense of nationhood. Giddens (1999:36) provides the following illustration of this process at work:

When Scots get together to celebrate their traditional identity they do so in ways steeped in tradition. Men wear the kilt, with each clan having their own tartan, and their ceremonials are accompanied by the wail of the bagpipes. By means of these symbols, they show their loyalty to ancient rituals – rituals whose origins go far back into antiquity.

Giddens (1999:37) points out that this story – accepted even by most Scots – is a fabrication, designed to serve a range of purposes. These so-called ancient rituals do not go back all that far at all!

Along with most other symbols of Scottishness, all these are quite recent creations. The short kilt seems to have been invented by an English industrialist from Lancashire, Thomas Rawlinson, in the early eighteenth century. He set out to alter the existing dress of Highlanders to make it convenient for workmen. Kilts were the product of the industrial revolution. The aim was not to preserve time-honoured customs, but the opposite – to bring the Highlanders out of the

heather and into the factory. The kilt didn't start life as the national dress of Scotland. The Lowlanders, who made up the large majority of Scots, saw Highland dress as a barbaric form of clothing, which most looked upon with some contempt. Similarly, many of the clan tartans worn now were devised during the Victorian period, by enterprising tailors who correctly saw a market in them. Much of what we think of as tradition, and steeped in the mists of time, is actually a product at most of the last couple of centuries, and is often much more recent than that ... The idea of tradition, then, is itself a creation of modernity ...

By turning socially constructed images into timeworn myths that go back to antiquity, history is not periodically recalled and revisited, but constantly imagined and reshaped. Our social creations are transformed into primordial and natural processes, or 'fabricated' into myths of 'foundation' (Arendt 1973:208). For instance, few children are informed that the image of Santa Claus as a corpulent, jolly, red-faced, gift-bearing, middle-aged man was the creation of a Coca-Cola advertising campaign in the early 1930s.

But there is also a much darker side to this tale of the social construction of Scottish identity and tradition that eventually leads to the white colonisation of Australia. This darker side relates to the way national identity and race can be used not only to create an imagined community of insiders, but also to exclude those who are different. By defining who can be an insider, groups mark boundaries that ward off outsiders. This political process lies at the heart of the racial and ethnic inequalities discussed in earlier sections of the book. The point to note here is how a sense of nationhood, and a sense of racial identity, can also lead to racism and a dehumanisation of others who are not part of the collective imagination. This sense of **collective identity** can be used to justify the most barbaric practices on behalf of 'civilisation' (see 'Civilisation, collective identity and dispossession', page 166).

To understand our contemporary debates surrounding the Australian identity, we have to acknowledge that nation-building was often a matter of rupture from the past for migrants and indigenous groups. It involved a painful break from the familiar, the creation of new identities and the imaginings of different futures. This was always played out against a backdrop of evolving power relations that reconfigured various dimensions of inequality. This was why migrant nations such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States have all experienced this pull between past and future identities, both at an individual level and at a level of national consciousness. Robert Hughes (1997:3) has also noted this tension:

A culture raised on immigration cannot escape feelings of alienness, and must transcend them in two possible ways: by concentration on 'identity', origins and the past, or by faith in newness as a value in itself.

Civilisation, collective identity and dispossession

Just at the moment that a new 'Scottishness' was being constructed, the Highland communities and lifestyles were being destroyed. Between the mid-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries the Highlands of Scotland were almost emptied of human life. The Highland lords were transforming clansfolk's farmland into pastoral land for the Cheviot sheep that, ironically, would produce the wool that would make the kilts. Scottish lords and English intellectuals argued that this shift from human habitation to sheep run was a progressive step for humankind. The displacement of the Highlanders – what came to be known as the Highland Clearances (Prebble 1976: chs 2, 3) – was viewed as a natural part of social evolution whereby the more 'advanced' civilisations would prevail over the more 'savage' races. This process in the Highlands was repeated in other parts of the world, and the ideology of progress and social development was used as the justification for European imperialist expansion on every continent (Said 1993; Wright 1976; Rist 1997). This critique of natural inequality was also addressed in chapter 2, in the discussion of the body.

It was further claimed that this process of contact between a more civilised and a less civilised culture was in the long-term interests of the Highlanders. However, the reality behind these ideological justifications for the civilising process was the transformation of inequality. The prevailing unequal form of feudal bond between lord and clansfolk was destroyed and replaced with a more modern form of inequality based on new socioeconomic relationships. Economically, the Highland Clearances pauperised the Highlanders through separating households from their customary land and removing their means of livelihood. However, the cultural destruction brought about by this forced removal from their land and the dispersal of the clans was equally devastating. Some Highlanders went south to work as wage labourers in the industrial towns of the lowlands, where they were treated as inferior and savage in appearance and tongue. Many others left Scotland's shores permanently, some voluntarily, others by force, and emigrated to Canada, the United States ... and also to Australia.

Don Watson (1997), the author of many of Paul Keating's speeches discussed at the beginning of this chapter, has written a fascinating and painful account of this process of emigration of the Highlanders to Australia, more specifically to Gippsland as it was being 'opened up' in the 1840s. This is where our tale of nationality, race and racism leads back to some of the more tragic elements of white invasion and settlement in Australia, and to the reconstruction of identity and the transformation of inequality.

Having been thrown off their land on the justification that civilisation must overcome barbarism, the Scottish Highlanders practised the same ideology of racism and nation-building by treating the Gippsland Aboriginal groups as savages and obstacles in the path of progress. This time, however, the Highlanders claimed to have history, culture and progress on their side. Their pioneering spirit in the Gippsland bush was accompanied by the 'dispersal' of local Aboriginal tribes, frontier violence and the same ideological justification of racial superiority and land 'improvement' used to clear the Highlands. Dispossession again could be justified as 'civilisation'.

To make sense of itself as a modern nation, Australia sought identity in the past, to provide its citizens with a sense of belonging. But this was not a search for origins that acknowledged the ethnic origins of all social groups inhabiting

the land. The manufacturing of the Australian national identity became one of privileging part of its collective heritage – the British part, especially the non-Irish British part – and marginalising all else. The remainder of this chapter will explore the construction of the Australian identity or the national character. One of the most enduring dimensions of this character is the myth of egalitarianism – the idea that all people should be treated equally.

The pervasiveness of the myth of egalitarianism

In chapter 5, we dealt with the relationship between inequality and life chances, pointing out that the structured nature of inequality is not always acknowledged by those who are disadvantaged. This section explores in more detail one of the reasons for the persistence of this situation, namely the myth of egalitarianism. Initially, it might appear counterintuitive that egalitarianism has come to be seen as a core character trait of the Australian identity or the Australian character. After all, modern Australia was founded as a penal colony with all the regimental status hierarchies and authoritarianism that such total institutions suggest (Hughes, R. 1996a). However, as Phillips pointed out, ‘almost from the beginning things did not work out that way’ (Phillips, A.A. 1966:50). Australian ideals and language abounded with the concept of egalitarianism as a defining ‘way of life’ and as a means of understanding past events and present actions.

Underlying this assumption of an egalitarian society is the concept of equity, which assumes that Australians do not tolerate injustice and that everyone can have, and should get, a ‘fair go’. Thus, Hancock (1945:63) could claim that, ‘Intolerance of oppression and sympathy with the under-dog are among the most attractive features of the Australian character’, while Fitzpatrick (1956) agreed that the Australian people ‘made heroes of none, and raised no idols, except perhaps an outlaw, Ned Kelly, and Carbine, a horse’. More recently, McNichol (2001:5) summed up the history of the ‘national character’ by claiming that

convicts naturally hated authority ... Happily the strict social divide between free settlers and ticket of leave convicts and their offspring has disappeared, leaving Australia a country where sudden wealth could catapult anyone from obscurity to celebrity overnight.

According to the myth, Australians love the underdog or ‘battler’ (Horne 1966:53), and their antipathy towards ‘tall poppies’ is raised to the status of a ‘syndrome’ (Crawford, R.M. 1970). The legendary myth of Australian ‘mateship’ is based on a supposed foundation of loyalty, respect, fairness

between individuals, or at least individual men. According to Hancock (1945:63), this

ideal of 'mateship' which appeals very strongly to the ordinary good-hearted Australian springs, not only from his eagerness to exalt the humble and meek, but also from his zeal to put down the mighty from their seat. [see also Stanner 1953:10; Harris 1966:57]

The rhetoric of fairness and equity pervades everyday language and our legal framework. There are colloquial expressions such as 'fair's fair', 'fair crack of the whip', 'fair enough', 'fair cop' and 'fair suck of the saveloy'. The legitimacy of courts is based on the expectation of a 'fair trial' (Troy 1981:9–10). The Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, the Honourable Murray Gleeson, AC (2000:62), stated that 'the value of equality before the law is deeply ingrained in our legal system, and in the Constitution'. The notion of a 'fair wage' became a central pillar of twentieth-century industrial relations, enshrined in the belief in 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay'. In commercial life, the concept of fairness also abounds. In the retail sector, regulations prohibit 'unfair trading', while in housing, state and Federal governments have occasionally intervened in the accommodation market to impose 'fair rents' (Albon 1980). Ramsey (2000) sums up the common belief that: 'Our culture mythologises "a fair go". Politicians massage it every possible way in their rhetoric ... It must be one of the most clichéd clichés in Australian political life.'

Adherence to equity and fairness can shift from one policy area to another. In some cases, governments believe that it is equitable to provide citizens with equal opportunities for self-advancement, while in other areas governments tend to place emphasis on equality of outcome. However, the goal of equality of opportunity does not preclude the probability that this can lead to unequal outcomes (Gleeson 2000:61–2; Troy 1981:10–12). This contentious nature of the concept of inequality was introduced in chapter 1 and will reappear in various political dimensions throughout the following chapters.

When Carroll (1992:144–5) speculated on the question 'What is typically Australian?', he replied that locals and visitors alike agree that 'the egalitarian-mateship ethic and its practice' characterise the nation (see also Hirst 1992:199). McAllister (1992) also listed egalitarianism as one of the five themes that constitute Australia's 'political culture'. The idea that 'classlessness' pervades Australian culture continues to be viewed as a characteristic that distinguishes the postcolonial state from its white origins. According to Prime Minister Howard (1996), Australians should take pride in themselves for 'having built one of the most prosperous, most egalitarian and fairest societies in the world' (see also Hage, 2001:27–31). The following section explores the origins of this myth.

The origins of the myth of egalitarianism

The myth of Australia as an egalitarian nation, or a classless society, began to pervade the colonial consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century (White, R. 1981: ch. 3; Blainey 2001:81). During this period, Australia began to emerge as a modern economy, in the sense used by Marx, Weber and Durkheim. Rates of urbanisation were high, a more complex division of labour emerged, modern rational government was founded and Australia became an integral part of the modern world capitalist economy through the exportation of primary products through its mercantile ports, which also acted as the destination for manufactured imports. Although modern manufacturing remained in a nascent stage, work – especially for men – remained plentiful, and an urban working class began to develop alongside a local mercantile and pastoral capitalist class (Wild 1978:29–30; Connell and Irving 1980: ch. 3).

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the myth of Australian egalitarianism was captured in the phrase that Australia was a ‘workingman’s paradise’, a term first used by the novelist Henry Kingsley in 1859. By the 1870s Australia had the highest income per capita in the world (Castles, F. 1988:115). The Melbourne building trades, for example, were the first unions in the industrialised world to push through an eight-hour day (Probert 1990:38). The high demand for white labour led to relatively high wages, while the gold rushes and pastoral work tended to make the labour force highly itinerant (Reynolds, H. 2000). The poet Charles Thatcher (in Turner, I. 1968:68), in his 1864 poem ‘Hurrah for Australia’, wrote that:

There’s no poverty here to distress us,
 ’Tis the country of true liberty,
 No proud lords can ever oppress us,
 But here we’re untrammelled and free.

The myth of egalitarianism was reinforced by the fact that many urban workers were recent migrants who could compare their current conditions favourably with those they had left behind in Europe. As a consequence, the myth of the workingman’s paradise was also used by statesmen and capitalists to encourage migration from the British Isles. Journals and travel memoirs began to extol the Australian lifestyle and to congratulate Australia for its treatment of the working class (Trollope 1873). In 1882, the banker and historian Henry Giles Turner informed the readers of the *Melbourne Review* that ‘there is no country in the world where the material prosperity and substantial comfort of the working class was so substantially assured as in Australia’ (quoted in Turner, I. 1968:105). On this basis, Carroll (1992:143) concluded that the attitudes of the working class ‘have permeated the more general Australian culture

since the middle of the Nineteenth Century with an egalitarian ethos'. By the end of the century, many observers considered Australia to be a 'laboratory of social reform' (Farrell 1987).

Other commentators have found a spatial basis for the egalitarian 'myth' – namely that it developed among the pioneers, early settlers and rural workers on the harsh and hostile pastoral frontier during the nineteenth century. According to this view, the frontier created a pioneering spirit out of which social values evolved that emphasised egalitarianism and collectivism. The egalitarianism of the colonies was therefore interpreted as a consequence of comradesly struggle in a tough and inhospitable land (Hancock 1945:59). This is where the associated myth of mateship originated, with its idealisation of fraternity, hostility to authority, the absence of privilege and lack of deference – as well as its lack of women! This has been explored in histories of the Australian character, such as Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1958) and Palmer's *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954). According to Ward, the conditions under which Australia was settled encouraged an ethos of equality and egalitarianism and had a levelling effect on social interaction. This formed the basis of contemporary attitudes whereby the 'typical' Australian

believes that Jack is not only as good as his master, but ... probably a good deal better, and so he is a knocker of eminent people ... He is fiercely an independent person who hates officiousness and authority. [Ward 1958:2]

Thus, according to Ward, the spatial, physical and social conditions existing on the nineteenth-century frontier promoted certain values and attitudes and, by the end of the century, these traditions of 'peer collectivity' (Taft 1966:194) were diffused into the cities, where they were appropriated to form the basis of a broader national identity.

Henry Reynolds (2000:18–19) has provided a more social-psychological explanation of this 'bush myth'. He argues that unlike most nation-states, Australia could not until World War I celebrate its foundation in any dramatic historical moment, such as war or revolution, that could capture the essence of identity (see also Hirst 1992:17; Carroll 1992:230). As a consequence, prior to 1914,

the explorers provided the heroism supplied in other nations by military prowess and success in battle ... Theirs was a battle 'fought and won over great natural difficulties and obstacles'. Such stirring deeds were ideal for the inculcation of national pride in the nation's youth. [Reynolds 2000:18–19]

By the time C.E.W. Bean wrote the history of the ANZAC troops in *The Australian Imperial Force in France: During the Allied Offensive, 1918* (1942), this interpretation of the Australian character and the Australian identity had

taken hold of the popular imagination. The importance of Gallipoli on the popular imagination can be explained by the fact that many social commentators remained concerned about the degenerative effects of the antipodean social and physical environment on the British character, as well as the impact of the 'convict strain' on the descendants of the penal colony. War was regarded as the ultimate test of national character (Gammage 1992: ch. 4). The Gallipoli experience was seen as a confirmation that the Australian character was worthy of the Empire. The egalitarian myth was extended to suggest that the Australian identity had freed itself from the more 'class-conscious' British cultural moorings through claims that Australian soldiers were not as deferential as others and that the social distance between officers and troops was less observable.

Flannery (quoted in Sheehan 1998:306), also echoes Ward by locating the origins of the Australian identity in the harshness of the land:

Australians have been shaped in a profound way, in a positive way, by the environment. We are so fortunate that the Australian environment, through its poverty, has forced upon us an ethos of social obligation, of mateship. Australian mateship is a realisation that we either stand together in this environment or fall alone.

The hold of this egalitarian bush myth remains popular today.

Challenging the myth of egalitarianism

Over the past few decades other commentators – sometimes labelled revisionist historians – have challenged this egalitarian interpretation of the Australian identity. Although these historians are reinterpreting history from different vantage points, they hold in common a desire to challenge the myth that Australia's past was egalitarian, and they reassess the role performed by social groups marginalised in the writing of history. These revisionists do not necessarily deny the hold of the myth on the collective conscience, but rather question its empirical foundations. To reiterate the point made in the introduction of this chapter, it makes little sense sociologically to state that this myth is 'false' because 'our imagination of ourselves might have its own truth; for it enshrines the things we believe in, the things that in general we want to be' (Crawford, R.M. 1970:130).

The feminist historian Dixon (1976:81) argued that mateship was a form of 'sublimated homosexuality'. More recently, Robert Hughes (1996a:320) linked this sublimation to the isolated bush environment: 'Because there were no white women in the bush, it meant – as some authorities grudgingly

acknowledged by the end of the 1830s – that “mateship” found its expression in homosexuality’ (see also Encel 1971:52–3). Feminists have also pointed to the exclusively male rendering of the Australian character. Reading Ward or Palmer gives the impression that during the nineteenth century the spirit of Australia was forged exclusively by males. Since the 1970s more historians have been engaged in writing women’s role into the shaping of Australia (Summers 1994; McMurchy, Oliver and Thornley 1983; Windschuttle, E. 1980).

Another source of ‘revisionism’ has come from the attempt to reassess the relationship between the invader and Indigenous Australians. Henry Reynolds (2000:48) argues that the myth of bush egalitarianism was built on shaky assumptions. Apart from being gendered, it also ignored the crucial role Aborigines performed in assisting exploration:

Those dramatic moments when black guides saved explorers from death by starvation, thirst or hostile spears underlined the fact that successful expeditions were triply dependent on Aboriginal expertise. The Europeans made use of trails, waterholes, tracks and traditional camping grounds and sought out the land prepared by centuries of sophisticated land management ... They were heavily dependent on the bushcraft, linguistic skill and diplomatic poise of their professional guides. Any failure to exploit these sources of expertise and knowledge was likely to lead to disaster, as the fate of Burke and Wills illustrated.

This central role performed by Aborigines in exploration was replicated in patterns of settlement. Reynolds (2000:98–9) documents how rural economic and social relations were based on racial exploitation rather than white egalitarianism and cooperation:

In central and northern Australia, the Aborigines were the mainstay of the European economy. Their labour was of crucial importance for sheep farmers in both Western Australia and central Queensland and for cattle producers on the vast northern frontier ... Aboriginal labour was also vitally important in the beche-de-mer and pearling industries. In towns and mining camps black servants performed most of the domestic labour. Aboriginal women also provided the sexual pleasure and companionship which made harsh frontier lives bearable ... It ensured the viability of European settlement over at least one-third of the continent, allowing the colonists to sustain their claim to be in actual and effective occupation of the Australian land mass.

Other historians have questioned whether the origins of the bush myth emanated from the prevailing conditions within the rural milieu. Richard White (1981) and Graeme Davison (1992) suggest that it was socially constructed from the perspective of the late-nineteenth-century inner city (see also Hirst 1992:23). The elevation of the bush myth into part of Australian national folklore and the Australian legend was the result not of a rural folk culture, but

of an emerging urban intelligentsia and their growing disenchantment with the poverty, alienation and inequality they witnessed in their urban midst. It had little to do with prevailing conditions in the bush.

According to Davison (1992), the economic boom during the 1880s resulted in the growth of the journalistic trade and the emergence of a group of young, footloose idealistic journalists inspired by egalitarian ideals and radical literature. However, during the economic depression of the early 1890s, urban unemployment began to rise and Melbourne and Sydney were experiencing severe housing shortages. These conditions fashioned journalistic attitudes towards the city, fuelling an anti-urban sentiment, rooted in alienation and loneliness. Directly confronting the myth that Australia was a 'workingman's paradise', the poet Henry Lawson wrote:

They lie, the men who tell us for reasons of their own
That want is here a stranger, and that misery's unknown.

Lawson and other urban social commentators invented their own conception of the bush as a romantic realm of comradeship and community to contrast with urban reality, symbolised by alienation, human degradation and exploitation. According to Davison, the Australian bush ethos, with its egalitarian overtones, was born from an urban experience and projected onto the bush. It was an attempt to establish the bush as the negation of the city.

Living conditions during the period also tended to contradict the egalitarian myth. While Twopenny (1976:37) claimed that it was common for the average worker to acquire 'a small freehold, and with the aid of a building society becomes his own landlord', in pre-1890s-depression Sydney only about 30 per cent of households were home owners. Many of these owners would have belonged to the upper or middle classes, leaving a minority of workers as home owners (Fry 1972). In addition, because housing was scarce and rents high, many workers were forced to construct their own dwellings on the outskirts of the major cities. Furthermore, rental areas such as Balmain, the Rocks and Paddington might be beyond the means of ordinary Australians today, but they were places where the nineteenth-century working class desperately attempted to escape. Indeed, in the early part of the twentieth century, Darling Harbour was visited by the bubonic plague. Max Kelly has described Sydney during this period as 'Picturesque and Pestilent', while its southern counterpart was described in 1889 as 'Marvellous Smelbourne' (Davison 1981:233).

As the depression of the 1890s deepened, the myth of a workingman's paradise appeared less sustainable. The journalist and socialist William Lane used the term 'workingman's paradise' as the ironic title of his novel on working-class Sydney in depression. His disillusionment with late-nineteenth-century Australian capitalist inequality convinced Lane to take a group of followers to

Paraguay, where they unsuccessfully attempted to establish a utopian egalitarian cooperative settlement called New Australia (Wilding 1984).

Despite this disillusionment experienced by many at the time, it needs to be borne in mind that inequality is a relative concept. While the socialist William Lane was abandoning hope of achieving equality in Australia, others – such as the Finnish utopian Kirruku – were bringing followers to Australia with the intention of building an egalitarian workers' paradise (Cormick 2000). Despite the 'romanticism' and the 'extreme naivete' to be found in the utopian literature of the time, Raymond Crawford (1970:137) also found a persistent assumption that 'this last-discovered continent need not be fettered to the inequalities and injustices of the world'.

The historians discussed in this section emphasise that the workingman's paradise was not open to all, despite the persistence of the myth. It was open more to working men than women (many of whom were concentrated in the sweated trades), and it was more open to white labour than Aboriginal, South Sea or Asian labour (Burgmann 1978; McQueen 1980; Reynolds, H. 2000). The myth also relied on economic prosperity as well as geographic expansion. The last decade of the century demonstrated this paradise could be easily destroyed by unemployment, old age, infirmity and recession. The experience of the 1890s depression redefined the political debate over egalitarianism and inequality, and set the political foundations for Federation and for most of the following century.

Federation and inequality

The strikes and social unrest that accompanied the depression of the 1890s formed the backdrop for the politics of Australian Federation. The following chapter will describe how the harsh terms that employers were able to impose upon the working class helped to harden class divisions and encouraged the very rapid growth of the industrial labour movement and its political wing, the Labor Party. Once the geographical unity and administrative centralism of federalism were agreed upon, the founders of Federation established the '**social contract**' that helped forge the modern Australian identity (Cope and Kalantzis 2000:24). This contract has been variously referred to as the 'Australian settlement' (Kelly, P. 1992:1–18), 'the Australian way' (Smyth and Cass 1998), 'the politics of domestic defence' (Castles, F. 1988), 'the workfare state' (Warby and Nahan 1998), 'the Australian Tradition' (Carroll and Manne 1992), 'protective statism' (Capling and Galligan 1992) or the 'Australian system' (Davis 2000:9). Regardless of the label, this series of interconnected institutions redefined the parameters of social inequality. The political decisions

that were made during the first decade after Federation were crucial to the formation of the national identity and shaped the form inequalities would assume.

The vulnerability of the newly federated nation was enhanced by the expansionary competition among European powers to partition the world, and by the emergence of Japan as a Pacific force. As a means of defence, Australia opted for the protection of a strong imperial power (Kelly, P. 2001: ch. 1). The founders of Federation believed that a hegemonic British Empire would ensure a strong Australia, and that the imperial connections that had created the colonies would continue to determine the course of the dominion's future. Symbolically, this maintenance of ties to the 'mother country' strengthened the perception of Australia as a 'youngster' that had yet to stand on its feet and whose identity had yet to be fully formed (Davison 1993; White, R. 1981: ch. 7).

Defence was only one justification for the maintenance of British ties. Because they believed in the superiority of British civilisation, the founders envisaged building a 'Britain in the antipodes'. The racial inequality and racial exclusion embedded within the constitution were captured in Section 51, as written at the 1897–98 Federal Convention, which gave the Commonwealth powers to 'make laws with respect to people of any race'. Thus, even before the Australian colonies were federated into a commonwealth, strong racial views were held by the predominantly British stock about the future cultural identity of the emergent nation and the notion of equality before the law.

One of the first acts of the new federated parliament was the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, prohibiting entry to Australia of non-whites. This was the consolidation of what became known as the White Australia Policy. Pacific Islanders and Asians were denied citizenship, and many were deported who had contributed to developing colonial Australia (Castles et al. 1992: ch. 2). Furthermore, as an extension of the White Australia Policy, the constitution excluded Indigenous Australians from citizenship. This policy was based on the belief that non-British cultures were permanently incompatible with the host culture (the dominant British culture) and would be a threat to this dominant culture (Castles et al. 1992: ch. 3). The founders of Federation based their vision of Australia on a united white race inspired by British culture. In September 1901 the first prime minister, Edmund Barton, opined: 'I do not think that the doctrine of equality of man was really ever intended to include racial equality.'

It was on the basis of this 'sameness' that the Australian myth of egalitarianism and a fair go was updated, nurtured and transformed. Chapter 9 will describe how the new Federation created an arbitration court that determined a fair wage and fair conditions for Australian workers. No employer could legally pay their workers a less-than-adequate income (Macintyre and Mitchell 1989:1–21). In 1907, it was determined that a wage should be sufficient for a male adequately to feed a wife and three children (Wilson, Thomson and

McMahon 1996: part 1). Australia could justly proclaim that it led the world in progressive labour legislation.

However, as the following chapter notes, this new version of the workers' paradise was built for men. Women's wages were not regulated until after World War I, when it was determined by the Arbitration Court that a woman was worth just over half a man's wage. Furthermore, the egalitarianism developed during the decade after Federation continued to exclude various social groups from the benefits of an egalitarian society, especially women, Indigenous Australians and non-British migrants (Ryan 1984; Probert 1989: ch. 6; Williams, C. 1992: ch. 6).

White male workers feared that their wages would be eroded by lower wages from non-British migrants, and many viewed the White Australia Policy as a form of wage security. They felt threatened by economic competition from non-White labour and embraced racist stereotypes about the incompatibility of Asians for the process of nation-building and the identity of the new nation (Curthoys and Markus 1978; McQueen 1980). Employers also successfully appealed to the new Parliament on the grounds that their capacity to pay for fair wages and decent conditions was dependent on the protection of manufacturing from foreign competition. In this way, the new Federation insulated itself further from the outside world by discouraging the importation of foreign goods (Castles, F. 1988:93–7; Butlin, Barnard and Pincus 1982: chs 3, 4; Anderson and Garnaut 1987).

Thus, the national identity that emerged from Federation was forged through exclusive as well as a racial interpretation of fairness. It encouraged an egalitarianism for some (especially white men), while keeping foreign products out of the country, keeping non-Whites out of Australia, ignoring the role of Indigenous Australians, and treating women and non-British migrants as second-class citizens. It provided a 'fair and reasonable wage' for (male) workers, state arbitration to settle industrial disputes, tariff protection for employers, and a bar on 'coloured labour' to give white Australians a monopoly over the labour market.

The egalitarianism this engendered was often interpreted as 'sameness'. Thus, from the sanctuary of a railway carriage in June 1922, D.H. Lawrence observed that 'Australia is the most democratic place I have ever been in. And the more I see of democracy the more I dislike it'. Despising the 'sameness' he saw everywhere, he complained about

the openness and the freedom of this new chaos, this litter of bungalows and tin cans scattered for miles and miles, this Englishness all crumpled out into formlessness and chaos ... Nothing, no inner life, no high command, no interests in anything, finally. [quoted in McQueen 1998:180; Gilbert 1988:40]

Despite the elitism embodied in these comments, Lawrence was responding to the monoculturalism sponsored by the structural pillars of the post-Federation nation-building consensus. Hancock (1945:63–4) voiced a similar sentiment less than ten years later:

To the outside observer Australians impress him as being the most monotonously uniform of people ... he is astonished at a racial homogeneity unparalleled in the New World and by a continent-wide sameness of the social structure ... and this striking standardization of material circumstances is emphasized by an equally striking standardization of habits.

Projecting forward, he predicted that if 'ever the ship of Australian democracy enters the calm waters of its millennium it will carry a fraternal but rather drab company of one-class passengers'. Hancock first published these thoughts early in the Great Depression, in September 1930.

The growth of the welfare state and the reshaping of equality

Like the 1890s depression, the economic disaster of the Great Depression highlighted the fragile basis on which workers' economic security and sense of identity and self-worth rested, and revealed in stark detail the glaring inequalities within Australian society. Unemployment peaked in Australia during 1932 at 29 per cent, and between 1930 and 1934 unemployment averaged 23.4 per cent (Windschuttle, K. 1979:13; Spenceley 1990:60–3). The Depression was an enormous jolt for many who believed that notions of equity and a fair go could be based on *laissez-faire* economics and an unregulated market. It fostered a generation of social reformers, community leaders, students and public servants committed to reforming and expanding the role of the state to ameliorate inequalities and broaden opportunities for socially disadvantaged groups. While World War II provided a solution to the high levels of unemployment of the 1930s, it also strengthened the hand of those who believed that the state should perform a more interventionist role in combating inequality (Smyth 1998). State interventionists argued that if the state could perform such an effective role in mobilising the nation for war against the Axis, then the same instrument could be used to solve the problems of postwar reconstruction.

State intervention as a means of promoting equity received enormous impetus through the Curtin and Chifley Labor governments between 1941 and 1949, especially through the Department of Post-War Reconstruction. Unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, pharmaceutical and hospital benefits, elements of a national health scheme, state-government housing and educational reform were introduced. Australia had never before come so close to having a

universal **welfare state** that attempted to ensure the equality of outcomes in so many areas of social life (Jones, M. 1990: ch. 3; Langmore and Quiggin 1994:60–2). As Manne (2001:148) notes, the postwar Labor Party ‘supposed that “nationalisation” and close government planning of industry would produce a more equal and efficient society’. While the Liberal Party opposed many of these reforms (on the grounds that they represented ‘old-fashioned’ socialism), and although it benefited from the failure of the Labor Party to nationalise the banking system, it retained much of the interventionist state in a modified form when the conservative side was returned to federal power in 1949. While Liberal rhetoric during this period emphasised that the principal responsibility for welfare rested with the individual citizen, they accepted the premise that the state should protect minimum standards of welfare and wages. Throughout the Menzies era, the state thus maintained its guardianship role with respect to fairness. In the area of employment, for example, the state was regarded as the ‘employer of the last resort’. It was assumed that the state had a responsibility to soak up unemployment, which remained at historically low levels during the 1950s and 1960s.

If the postwar myth of egalitarianism was promoted by the idea of the state as a leveller, it was reinforced by cultural policy. Until World War II, Australia remained 95 per cent British stock, and monoculturalism remained the cornerstone of the Australian identity (Jupp 1996:182). However, after World War II, demand for industrial labour and concerns about defence reignited fears that Australia had to ‘populate or perish’. When attempts failed to increase immigration from Britain, Arthur Calwell, Australia’s first Minister for Immigration, was forced to relax the White Australia Policy. Between 1945 and 1960, more than 2.6 million immigrants arrived in Australia, and more than half of these came from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Jupp 1966).

Despite this enormous influx of non-British migrants, an effort was made to maintain the cultural purity of the White Australian identity through the policy of *assimilationism*. Non-British migrants were expected to blend into Australian society and eventually become indistinguishable from the mainstream (Jupp 1988:164). Assimilationism reflected the desire to retain **social homogeneity** and sameness at a time of momentous demographic and social change.

Aboriginal Australians were also subjected to the policy of assimilationism, although practised with a much greater degree of state paternalism and racial discrimination. The long-term traumatic and tragic results of assimilationism have more recently been the subject of a report of a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston 1991) and a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report entitled *Bringing Them Home* (Wilson 1997; see also Reynolds, H. 1999; Kidd 2000). As the Royal Commission (Johnston 1991:8–11) noted, the aim of postwar government policy was to

assimilate the Aboriginal people by encouraging them to accept Western culture and lifestyle, give up their culture, become culturally absorbed and indistinguishable, other than physically, from the dominant group ... The consequence of this history is the partial destruction of Aboriginal culture and a large part of the Aboriginal population and also disadvantage and inequality of Aboriginal people in all the areas of social life ...

The ongoing impacts of these policies for Aboriginal cultural identity were discussed at greater depth in chapter 6.

During this period, local and outside observers continued to define Australian culture in terms of its egalitarian impulse. For instance, the novelist James A. Michener in *Return to Paradise* (1951) wrote:

If you sought two words to sum up Australia, they would be average and British. Australians love the average – not the mediocre, but the average wage, the average good bloke, the average happiness. There are few millionaires, almost no poverty. The cow cocky with a dozen head will argue with the squatter.

In a 1953 collection entitled *The Australian Way of Life*, Sir Frederic Eggleston (1953:15–16) could speak of white progress with satisfaction, noting that:

Australian people have tamed into production an arid continent, old and unpromising, and have done so with such skill that they have a high national income per head and a high standard of living. The current philosophy insists that this wealth shall be shared. Australia is a classless society ... Australians firmly believe that their way of life is unique, and they are fanatically determined to protect it. They believe that it is based on the common mores of a homogenous community and are therefore determined to prevent those norms from being broken down by the admission in large numbers of unassimilable elements.

If assimilationism supported the myth of egalitarianism from a policy perspective, economic conditions reinforced it further. This was a period of unprecedented world growth, and postwar Australians felt more assured that capitalism had solved the problems of periodic depressions. As the long boom continued, growth and prosperity were considered permanent features of modern life and every Australian was assumed to be within reach of ‘the great Australian dream’, which conjured up an image of a detached bungalow full of hire-purchase modern consumer goods, with a car, and a nuclear family (Whitwell 1989; Carroll 1992:231; Murphy 2000). Prime Minister Howard has used these images of the 1950s to refashion a sense of national unity:

I remember from my childhood ... you had a great sense in which people were pretty much the same. Some were a little better off than others. Some didn’t have cars; they all seemed to have a house and a backyard and that basic sort of sufficiency. There wasn’t a big divide. You were conscious that there were some wealthy people living in another part of the city and there were some people who

were struggling, but there was a sense that you were all the same ... rediscovering that sense of egalitarianism is important for the cohesion of our country. [quoted in McGregor, C. 1997:94]

This 'Australian way of life' was the 1950s equivalent of the 1880s workingman's paradise. However, even during this period, there were voices that warned of the complacency that such a myth could generate:

The idealistic, thoughtless conception of 'an Australian way of life' can easily become a fable, blinding us to the unpleasantness that could become permanent unless a sternly severe movement sets in. National slogans which are no more than grand abstractions, emptied of all references to reality, are simply a means of self-delusion. [Stanner, 1953:6]

The very notion of *an* Australian way of life promoted the idea of a homogeneous population that discouraged difference and innovation (de Lepervanche 1990:182). Stanner, for one, believed this was self-delusion:

One of our great difficulties is that we are now passing out of – I should say, we are well out of – a period of transition from relatively unitary ideals and homogeneous culture into a period of conflicting ideals and mixed, jangling schemes of life. [Stanner 1953:8]

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the voices of marginalised categories tended to go unheard and most Australians accepted the myth that they lived in the 'lucky country'. This phrase was the title of a book on Australian culture written by Donald Horne and quickly became a colloquial expression. Even though Horne's term was partly tinged with irony, he believed that the egalitarian myth remained alive:

There is a whole set of characteristics summed up in the phrase 'Fair go, mate' ... The general Australian belief is that it is the government's job to see that everyone gets a fair go – from old age pensioners to manufacturers. [Horne 1966:32]

According to Horne, this state paternalism continued to promote homogeneity and egalitarianism.

However, by the mid-1960s some social commentators were beginning to question whether the government was performing adequately with respect to ameliorating inequality. The mid-1960s was a time when Australians 'rediscovered' poverty in their midst (see 'Cultural visions and cultural blind spots', page 181).

During the late 1960s, more academics and politicians began to 'penetrate through the mists of the propaganda of affluence' and talk of 'the poor' (Connell and Irving 1980:303). However, as sociologists and other social scientists 'rediscovered' poverty in the late 1960s and inequality started to become a

Cultural visions and cultural blind spots

In contrast with the prevailing myth of egalitarianism, the lucky country and the Australian way of life, the journalist John Stubbs (1966:8), in his book *The Hidden People: Poverty in Australia*, argued that Australians had been deluded with the encouragement of politicians into accepting the 'dangerous lie' that their nation was 'one of the fairest in the world' with abundant welfare provisions. Stubbs found widespread poverty among subgroups of the population, from the old, the young, women, disabled and migrants to inner-city dwellers and Aborigines, and in the countryside. The inadequacy of welfare provisions and social services, plus the failure of academics to investigate the extent of poverty in Australia, was only possible 'because the poor have no voice, no unity, no political influence and power' (Stubbs 1966:4).

Donald Horne (2001a:122), the author of *The Lucky Country*, has recently written of the context in which poverty and inequality entered the Australian imagination during this period, noting that the idea of putting poverty back on the 'list of topics seen as political' originated in the USA with the publication of Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1971) and the US government's 'War on Poverty'. He also gives credit to the demographer R.T. Appleyard, who – a year before Stubbs's book – had estimated that there were approximately 60,000 Australians living in 'pockets of poverty'.

sociological subject in its own right (see Baldock and Lally 1974: ch. 5; Henderson, Harcourt and Harper 1970; Australian Institute of Political Science 1969; Jamrozik 1991:232–3), the foundations of the post-Federation 'social contract' began to crumble. The consequences of this transformation will be explored in chapter 10.

Transforming the post-Federation egalitarian myth

This section of the chapter outlines some of the key political changes that have affected the transformation of inequalities in Australian society over the past thirty years. The purpose of this concluding section is to place the contemporary transformations that will be discussed in chapter 10 within the historical perspective of the prevailing myth of egalitarianism. It demonstrates how political myths are sustained and redefined to reflect changing socioeconomic circumstances.

It should be stressed that this section is not concerned with empirically testing the myth of egalitarianism against evidence, nor does it assess whether Australia is a more or less egalitarian society now than it was thirty years ago. There are some who believe that the institutions built at the time of Federation (described in the last section) served Australia well and promoted a high level of prosperity (Borland, Gregory and Sheehan 2001:1), while others believe that they produced 'a young nation with geriatric arteries' (Kelly, P. 1992:15). This concluding section describes how the myth of egalitarianism based upon

a homogenous Australian way of life was challenged and redefined during the last twenty-five to thirty years of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is this transformation that brings the chapter back to the debates of the 1990s concerning national identity and inequality.

First, Australia's identification with its colonial past has been the subject of extensive political debate. Australia's commitment to the British Empire was demonstrated through its decision to send a generation of its youth to fight for Britain in World War I, even though Australian territory was not directly threatened (Gammage 1992). A quarter of a century later, Prime Minister Menzies could still inform the nation that Britain was at war with Germany 'and *as a result*, Australia is also at war' (emphasis added). The surrender of Singapore in February 1942 exposed Australia's 'self-delusion' that it could rely upon an imperial benefactor (Kelly, P. 2001:218–24). Despite this, after the war the nation forged closer links with another hegemonic superpower, the US, although the new benefactor remained predominantly white. Australia followed the US into the Vietnam conflict during the 1960s under much the same rationale as its earlier commitments to Britain. However, since the 1970s there has been more recognition that national security is not necessarily assured through being bilaterally attached to an imperial benefactor. Security is now linked to more regional and global concerns. As issues such as the East Timor crisis, refugee crises and environmental degradation demonstrate, it has become increasingly difficult to quarantine Australia from regional and global political problems, or to turn a blind eye to global oppression and inequality. Since the 1970s, most Australian governments have sought broader multilateral relationships that unite the region, encourage global security and promote growing global interconnectedness, while occasionally retreating behind the might of imperial benefactors.

Second, as the ties with Empire were loosened, it became more and more untenable to maintain trading barriers against the rest of the world. In the 1930s, 60 per cent of Australia's exports went to Europe compared to 7 per cent in 2000. There has been a growing consensus that Australia is part of a dynamic regional and wider global economy and that its prosperity is dependent upon participation in the world economy (Australian Manufacturing Council 1990; Garnaut 1989). It is no longer tenable to accept, as the founders of Federation did, that the nation could insulate itself against international competition. The historic battles over tariffs appear archaic and the debate has shifted to the question of the nature of Australia's global linkages and, correspondingly, attitudes towards fairness. The growing interconnectedness of economies and cultures – the process of globalisation – has forced enterprises, government and cultural institutions, and national governments to ask more self-consciously what unifies people as a group and what distinguishes them from others. In this process, national-identity politics appears to become an exercise in economic and cultural niche marketing.

Third, as the image of Empire faded, official policy began to question the centrality of Anglo-Celtic culture. The massive postwar immigration drive – originally conceived to expand population, bolster defence and strengthen the economy – could only succeed through encouraging non-British migrants from Europe and later from Asia. Since 1945, more than 5.5 million immigrants have come to Australia, and more than 25 per cent come from a non-English-speaking background. By 2000, 40 per cent of the population were either migrants or children of migrants. The consequences of this massive scheme were unintended by its creators. Australia now boasts one of the most ethnically diverse societies in the world, with some 100 ethnic groups speaking some 80 ethnic languages and some 150 indigenous languages. Few nations throughout history have embarked on such an enormous project of pluralistic immigration. However, as the discussion of cultural identity in chapter 6 revealed, the success of this human experiment has made the issue of national identity all the more contentious over the past thirty years, an issue that will be revisited in chapter 10.

More importantly, official attitudes towards cultural homogeneity have changed. Until the early 1970s, Australia continued to pursue a policy of assimilationism, dictating that all migrants shed their home culture and adopt the monocultural identity that the host nation called ‘the Australian way of life’. However, as the following chapter explains, by the late 1960s there were growing doubts over the efficacy of assimilationism as a policy that promoted egalitarianism. The main problem with the policy was that it reinforced racism:

It dehumanised migrants; it proceeded from an assumption of British superiority. Its fundamental implication was that migrant cultures were at best inferior and undesirable, and at worst, positively dangerous and threatening. [Li and Cockayne 1999:239]

Since the 1970s, official government policies have promoted the advantages of cultural diversity, or multiculturalism. This remains a highly contested concept. Detractors fear that it will lead to ‘ethnic tribalism’ and social division, and desire a return to the Federation dream of fixing the Australian identity. Supporters argue that neither the migrant nor the host society remains static in this process of immigration, and that this hybridity transforms the idea of a national identity to one emphasising a shared space of debate (Reynolds, P. 1991: ch. 9). They argue that the solutions of the first decade of Federation ensured a fair go for some Australians, but excluded others. It was a citizenship based on exclusion and it was a fairness that feared difference.

Fourth, Indigenous Australians have also had to struggle on even more fronts than immigrants. While most migrants chose to come to Australia, Indigenous Australians have had a foreign culture imposed upon them in their own lands. Before the late 1960s, they were denied most rights everyone else

enjoyed as citizens, while at the same time the states attempted to impose assimilationism upon them. It has only been since the late 1960s that the Federal Government has begun to accept the principles of Aboriginal self-determination. Chapter 10 returns to some of the issues surrounding cultural difference highlighted in chapter 6, in order to reveal how these shifts towards cultural pluralism have altered the parameters of debate on equity through highlighting the problematic nature of fairness once inequality began to be viewed multidimensionally.

Fifth, the next chapter will also trace how the exclusionary fortress of a *workingman's* paradise was besieged. Throughout the twentieth century, women struggled to introduce equal-pay legislation. However, the failure of women to achieve parity with men in the world of paid work has transformed the debates over gender equity, introducing issues of comparable worth, the relationship between paid and unpaid work, and the nature of the 'glass ceiling'.

Sixth, since the late 1980s the powers of state arbitration have been eroded. The post-Federation concept of the state as leveller has given way to the ideal of a nightwatchman role. As late as 1970, the former Liberal prime minister Gorton could still extol the virtues of the state as an industrial referee:

It would be disastrous to Australia if principles of arbitration previously accepted were reversed ... Nothing can damage the cause of organised labour and the stability of industry more than to reject or replace an arbitration system which, to be fully effective, must have the ultimate capacity to apply teeth in its judgment. [quoted in Sorrell 1977:248]

However, by the 1990s, Federal Labor and Liberal governments had been extracting the teeth of the arbitration tiger. The notion of centralised wage-fixation was no longer an unquestioned part of Australia's political and economic landscape. This led to a struggle over the terms under which employers and employees bargain over a fair wage.

Furthermore, as chapter 10 will show, these historical changes have been occurring at a time when the Australian economic landscape is being dramatically altered by technological change and global competition. Probert (2001:27) has noted how the myth of egalitarianism has been transformed amid these socioeconomic changes:

Looking back from 2001, it is hard to know which is more remarkable: the stability of the class compromise achieved at Federation or the speed with which it unravelled over the past twenty years. The economic pressures and the ideas used to dismantle the egalitarian structures and sentiment are not unique to Australia but Australia turned out to be far more vulnerable to these pressures and ideas than, for example, the European social democracies.

The relative security afforded by tariff protection and state arbitration has been replaced with growing job insecurity captured in phrases such as 'the end

of certainty' and the feeling that 'we live in times of change and uncertainty' (Kelly, P. 1992; Waldren 1999; Horne 1996). The workers' movement and employer organisations debate, negotiate and fight under a very different set of rules than those designed at Federation.

Conclusion

If we return to the debates over the past decade that introduced this chapter, it is now possible to appreciate the weight of history. Different commentators representing conflicting views can present selective accounts of Australian history to manufacture it anew or to revive specific images of the past. Chapter 10 will suggest that this conflict accounts for the intensity of feeling surrounding these debates. Each debate shares in common with the others a concern with collective identity and inequality. These reflect a nation reassessing its past and its displacements on the one hand and, on the other hand, imagining the future. At the heart of the relationship between self and nation is a series of questions about culture: Who are Australians? What does an Australian look like? What are the things that bind Australians together as a people and a nation? Answers to these questions are not simple, but the debate has been long overdue. Encel's (1971:40) description of Australia's dilemma remains as pertinent today as it was thirty years ago:

Australians have, throughout their history, felt threatened because of their exposed position as an isolated European outpost in the South Pacific, and their racialism is, in part, a reaction to this fundamental insecurity ... We can no longer rely on Britain, and the United States will not provide an effective substitute. The task of maintaining some kind of national identity, without colonial dependence, without racialism, and far away from Europe, is a task of appalling difficulty which must nevertheless be faced.

As this chapter has illustrated, one of the core features of this 'Australian identity' since the mid-nineteenth century has been the myth of egalitarianism. This myth has undergone a series of transformations in meaning and function over the past 150 years. As a result, the way Australians have understood equality and inequality has been in a state of constant flux. This chapter has charted this evolution. While some commentators have attempted to find a material or empirical basis for the myth – such as the pioneer spirit, the bush, the workingman's paradise, an Australian way of life – this chapter has merely charted the evolution of the idea. Yet, as the following two chapters will demonstrate, without such a contextual appreciation it is impossible to adequately understand the contested nature of inequality. Perceptions of inequality shape the nature of political struggles against it. For these reasons, it is

impossible to expect a sociological textbook on Australian inequality written in 1970 to reflect the dimensions of inequality in the year 2003. As Probert (2001:38) points out: 'If the objective underpinnings of the Australian class system have been transformed over the past twenty years, it should not surprise us that attitudes to class have also been turned upside down.' The following two chapters are organised with this in mind.

Chapter 9 explores the history of political identities and allegiances since Federation. This history of parliamentary politics and extra-parliamentary activity demonstrates how political inequality mirrors the growing complexities outlined in the previous chapters on the body and the self. Drawing on histories of various social-protest movements, it charts this growing complexity. It illustrates how various social groups demanding an end to inequality resisted the ethos of the exclusionary post-Federation politics embedded in the myth of egalitarianism. It concludes that the failure to achieve substantive equality through parliamentary politics was related to unequal control over, and access to, social resources such as work, education and information.

Chapter 10 begins by critically assessing a number of recent conservative and radical theories that have argued in different ways that the growing importance of control over communications has transformed the class structure of Australian society. While some of these theories are responses to the perceived decline in class, ethnic and gender inequalities, the chapter argues that these concepts remain essential for understanding the manner in which inequality has been transforming. However, the ways in which they are layered and intertwined have changed. The chapter examines how different dimensions of inequality have been remoulded by social and economic circumstances and rethought by political actors. It examines the growing integration of Australia into a global economy and argues that the measurement of relative equality has shifted from a national to an international scale, from a 'fairness' relative to other Australian citizens to a more global measurement of fairness based on international productivity. In other words, while previously notions of fairness were more mediated by local politics, now they are being transformed by the international market.

Key terms and concepts

- Egalitarianism
- Political myth
- Collective identity
- Federation social contract
- Welfare state
- Social homogeneity

Study questions

- 1 In what sense is Australia an 'imagined community'?
- 2 Critically examine the empirical bases for the claim that Australian egalitarianism has its roots in the bush and on the frontier.
- 3 List the consequences for egalitarianism of the post-Federation social contract between organised labour, capital and the state.
- 4 Kelly argues that the demise of this social contract (what he labels 'the Australian settlement') was inevitable. Do you agree?
- 5 In 1971, Encel warned that: 'The task of maintaining some kind of national identity, without colonial dependence, without racialism, and far away from Europe, is a task of appalling difficulty which must nevertheless be faced.' What were these appalling difficulties, and how have Australians responded to them over the past thirty years?

Further reading

- Cope, B., and M. Kalantzis. 2000. *Under the Sun: Re-creating the Australian Way of Life*. Sydney: HarperCollins.
An examination of how the post-Federation social contract shaped 'the Australian way of life', and of the contemporary forces that are redefining the Australian identity. The issues are illustrated with interviews with influential Australians.
- Irving, H. (ed.). 2001. *Unity and Diversity: A National Conversation*. Sydney: ABC Books.
A multidisciplinary collection of essays that reflect on the centenary of Federation from a variety of dimensions of inequality and difference, including class, gender space, race and ethnicity.
- Jamrozik, A., C. Boland and R. Urquhart. 1995. *Social Change and Cultural Transformation in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
This sociological book on the relationship between economic and cultural change provides a balance between empirical and theoretical analysis. It also presents a discussion of contemporary class analysis that relates to chapter 10, this volume.
- Kelly, P. 2001. *100 Years: The Australian Story*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
This more journalistic book is a detailed extension of the author's introduction to his earlier book *The End of Certainty*, which describes the institutional pillars of the Australian settlement.
- Smyth, P, and B. Cass. 1998. *Contesting the Australian Way: States, Markets and Civil Society*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
A collection of political essays critical of Kelly's reading of twentieth-century Australian economic history, and defends a more interventionist role for the state in the modern economy.
- White, R. 1981. *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688 to 1980*. Sydney: George Allen & Unwin.
A historical examination of the making and reshaping of the Australian identity from the colonial era to the 1980s, emphasising the manner in which the Australian character was socially constructed.

9 Citizenship, Nation-Building and Political Struggles for Equality

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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The previous chapter charted how the myth of egalitarianism evolved alongside the Australian national identity throughout the twentieth century. For most of the century, the meaning of this egalitarianism emphasised exclusion of others considered unfit to participate in the process of nation-building. This exclusion manifested itself most openly in racial terms but was also evident along other dimensions of inequality, such as gender. In this sense, the previous chapter framed the body and the self within the historical context of the contested nature of identity.

This chapter explores how various social movements endeavoured to recast the parameters of equality during the twentieth century. While these struggles were multifaceted, they all sought to extend the boundaries of Australian egalitarianism and Australian citizenship, and to transform the exclusionary terms on which national identity and the nation-building project had been established. On one level, these political struggles for equality demonstrate a high degree of

openness to reform within the Australian political system. However, they were conducted on shifting social and economic terrain. As political reform altered the boundaries of inequality and exclusion, new forms of inequality and perceptions of nation-building appeared on the horizon. These contemporary forms and perceptions of inequality will be explored in chapter 10.

The struggle for equality in the labour market

By Federation, Australian organised labour was conscious of the structural inequalities embedded in the labour market. As a consequence of their struggles for a fair wage and better conditions, unions looked to the parliamentary process to regulate the terms under which labour could be hired. For most of the twentieth century, the regulatory framework of wage conciliation and arbitration remained the accepted mechanism to curtail the freedom of contract in the labour market. It was this freedom that promoted the structural inequality between labour and capital through advantaging capital at the expense of labour. As long as the state acted as a guarantor for a 'living wage', the Australian labour movement accepted the legitimacy of the political structures built around industrial relations.

The capitalist system that Australia inherited as a colonial settlement was truly revolutionary in the sense that it was a social system based on the perpetual need to transform the very basis of its own productive capacity. This process of 'creative destruction' was a necessary part of the struggle between competing capitals. The ability of individual capitalists to engage successfully in competition was dependent on their ability to determine the conditions under which they employed one of their key productive assets, the labour force. This control, or 'managerial prerogative', is best achieved through the power that the employer has over the worker within a 'free' labour market. The contract between the individual worker and the employer is not negotiated on equal terms because the worker's need for employment is greater than the employer's need for any individual worker. This lies at the heart of the inequality in the wage relationship, and explains why Marx considered the 'freeing' of labour from feudal ties as a legal formality that merely hid the transformation of inequality from a feudal into a capitalist relationship. By defining the wage relationship as a contract freely entered into by two consenting parties, the capitalist system presents this as an equal exchange. However, in reality, by treating each party the same, regardless of their individual circumstances, this 'formal equality' guarantees unequal outcomes.

When workers negotiate contracts individually, they enter this relationship on unequal terms. Employers can decide how many workers they need, which

workers to hire and the work to be undertaken. Workers are further disadvantaged under conditions where demand for labour is low and the supply is high, because employers can engage workers in competition to devalue the price of labour. Historically, when labour supply is short and demand high, employers have sought ways to undermine workers' bargaining power, such as recruiting 'reserve armies' of labour (for example, unemployed or married women), and promoting immigration, encouraging new technologies that reduce the need for labour (more intensive exploitation) or transforming work practices in order to increase worker output (more extensive exploitation). Furthermore, managerial prerogative diminishes the dignity of labour and tends to reduce its power of creativity. As Richardson (1999:9) notes,

employers, in setting the conditions of employment and in their daily relations with their workforce, are in a position to consult only their opinion or judgement and can ignore the interests or opinions of their workers ... Decent treatment then is not a right but a gift in the hands of the employer. This is a relationship of subordination, not equality.

The most effective method for workers to ameliorate this structural inequality in the wage relationship is through combining in **solidarity** to negotiate for a fairer outcome. This is the basis of unionisation. Probert (1989:34–5) lists a variety of advantages that unionisation holds. First, a united workforce can improve their collective-bargaining stance through threatening to withdraw their labour, or striking. Second, collectively, workers can pool resources to lessen the structural imbalance of power with their employers. Strike funds, for example, can prolong the withdrawal of labour and put additional pressure on the employer to meet the strikers' demands. Third, unions can enforce a policy at their workplaces whereby union members have preference in employment over non-union members. This 'closed shop' environment diminishes the employer's opportunity during strikes to hire other workers – or 'scabs' – who refuse to cooperate with striking workers. Fourth, workers can also engage in 'picketing' the targeted workplace, using their combined physical presence and strength to discourage those who contemplate 'scabbing'. Fifth, organised labour has occasionally used its power to control the supply of labour. For example, at times unions have fought in certain industries to act as a 'hiring hall' from which employers must accept labour. This ensures that wages are maintained even though labour supply exceeds demand. However, as noted in chapter 8, unions have also excluded certain categories of people from employment, usually on the pretext that these more 'docile' categories of workers lower wages. As later sections of this chapter reveal, throughout much of the twentieth century women were excluded from a range of tasks that male-dom-

inated unions classified as 'men's work', and unions supported the exclusion of certain migrants under the pretext that they would compete 'unfairly' in the labour market, and reduce wages and conditions.

Collectivism is therefore a valuable tactic used by organised labour to ameliorate the structural inequalities inherent in the wage relationship. Throughout the past 150 years, organised labour has fought on political and industrial fronts for every advance, from improved wages, shorter working hours, improved health and safety, and workers compensation to holiday time, superannuation and other working conditions. Unions must persistently emphasise that any gains have been won at the expense of capital through previous struggles, and that wages and conditions at any given time represent a contingent balance of political forces, rather than some 'natural' state. Historical consciousness therefore performs a central role in the politics of workplace inequality.

The institutionalisation of Australian class conflict

The last chapter pointed out that the myth of egalitarianism was nurtured under the prevailing economic and social conditions of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Despite high immigration intakes, labour tended to remain in short supply, contributing to high standards of living relative to the rest of the industrialising world (Castles, F. 1988:111–18). Despite this, the workers' paradise was restricted mainly to skilled workingmen and was dependent on the buoyant economy of the second half of the nineteenth century (Roe 1988:1–4). Under these conditions, a strong workers' consciousness developed among sections of the labour movement, who were able to lead the world in demands such as the eight-hour day (Fitzpatrick 1968:77–89).

However, the depression of the 1890s demonstrated the extent to which employers could wield their power over labour. Under conditions of high unemployment, manufacturing and pastoral capitalists seized the initiative in the industrial struggle through dismissing labour, reducing wages and extending working hours. Powerful unions representing shearers and maritime workers suffered major defeats at the hands of employers, for many workers were prepared to accept the 'desperate exchange' of lower wages (Richardson 1999:11). In addition, during the depression, colonial governments intervened in industrial struggles and the union movement recognised that the police and the judiciary supported the interests of employers over workers, breaking picket lines and enforcing property laws (Fitzpatrick 1968:112–44).

Worker organisations drew from these experiences the lesson that under adverse conditions union strength could be undermined by a combination of

employer offensive, economic adversity and state power (Sorrell 1977:249). This awareness led organised labour to

turn to political action designed to change the state from an enemy into a friend ... They turned to the state as a countervailing force to the employers' industrial supremacy, seeking state power so that employers could be made to yield what they would not offer. [Macintyre 1985:50–1]

The conclusion drawn was that industrial struggle could only be effective when combined with parliamentary muscle. Thus, during the 1890s depression the Labor Party was established to advance the cause of labour through parliament.

During the first decade of the twentieth century the Australian labour movement committed itself to the legal structures and procedures that emerged out of colonial state arbitration boards and wage boards of the late nineteenth century as a mechanism to settle industrial disputes (Macintyre 1985:48–9). Arbitration institutionalised conflict between workers and employers through its power to determine wage levels and other conditions of employment, and to make these decisions binding throughout industries. It encouraged voluntary agreements between disputants, offering conciliation and arbitration services in the event of disagreement, and encouraged disputants to channel their demands through established representative bodies of unions and employer associations (Hancock, Fitzgibbon and Polites 1985:211).

The 1907 Harvester Judgement galvanised the faith of unionists (especially males) in the fairness of the system of state arbitration. It set a minimum wage for an unskilled male worker, calculated on the average weekly needs of the average male. In 1908 Higgins added that a 'wage that does not allow for the matrimonial condition for an adult man is not fair and reasonable, is not a "living wage"' (quoted in Stilwell 1996:10). The earlier *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* also encouraged the union movement to look upon the state as a source of fairness. By restricting entry to Australia of non-white labour – especially South Sea Island and Asian workers – it allowed white males to monopolise the local labour market, kept demand high and protected white living standards. While in reality 'the just wage remained an unrealised ideal' (Macintyre 1985:58), it institutionalised the belief that workers' remuneration should be based on a socially defined conception of fairness, rather than a market-driven conception of an employer's capacity to pay, or on grounds of international competitiveness or company efficiency. The majority of workers saw the union movement as the most effective means of obtaining better conditions. The state-sanctioned awards that unions fought for have covered up to 80 per cent of workers throughout most of the twentieth century. Total membership numbers also steadily rose and union density rates followed a similar pattern, rising from just under 30 per cent in 1911 to almost 60 per cent before the

Great Depression, before slowly climbing to their peak of more than 60 per cent in the post-World War II era (Harcourt 1999:87–9; Rawson 1992:12).

On the other hand, while many employers considered the arbitration system an infringement on their managerial prerogative, most recognised its advantages. Combined with the imposition of high manufacturing tariffs, this ‘new protectionism’ ensured that fair wages would not threaten manufacturing competitiveness, even if it might inhibit efficiency. Manufacturers were also legally protected from the threat of employers who used ‘sweated’ labour. Furthermore, many employers could accept the promise of greater industrial peace that the system offered. For the architects of arbitration, such as Higgins and Deakin, arbitration was a cornerstone of their vision of a more harmonious community where each social partner functioned as part of the cooperative exercise in social progress and self-sufficient nation-building (Mason 2001:14).

The Achilles heel of the industrial bargain was that this conception of fairness depended on the ability to secure employment (Smyth 1998:91; Macintyre 2001:165). For this reason, Francis Castles (1985:102–9; 1988:129) has labelled this class compromise ‘the **wage-earners’ welfare state**’. Its fairness depended on the capacity of the market to deliver full employment. It was also premised on the belief that once workers had secured a fair wage, their needs could be fully satisfied through the market. It was, as Bell and Head (1994:10) suggest, ‘a kind of statist *laissez-faire*’ approach to nation-building. However, the Depression of the early 1930s left a strong legacy on an entire generation of public figures, who concluded from this experience that the market could not deliver full employment or a more equitable outcome for those in a vulnerable labour-market position (Whitwell 1986:60–1; Capling, Considine and Crozier 1998:122–6). This conclusion was drawn not only from the failure of the market to provide adequate employment, but also from its inadequacies in other essential services, such as housing (Spenceley 1990:40–54; Greig 1995). These challenges were taken up by the Australian state after World War II.

The consolidation of the postwar wage-earners’ welfare state

The 1930s Depression reinforced the belief that a second institutional revolution in Australian politics was required to address existing class inequalities. This involved state-interventionist welfare policies and nation-building programs to complement the institutions established in the first decade of Federation (Smyth 1998:86; Macintyre 2001:167). This was initiated under the wartime and postwar Labor governments, and maintained by the Coalition government and the Whitlam Labor government into the 1970s. The post-Federation institutional structures of wage arbitration and manufacturing protection

were now combined with other political innovations, such as a secure welfare net and state-sponsored industrialisation, to guarantee greater economic and political stability for the postwar nation-building project. These policies, 'effected in the name of equity and a "new order"' (Cass and Freeland, quoted in Smyth 1998:85) represented a significant advance in the Australian search for equality. A further condition of this form of postwar development was global economic stability, a condition promoted by the Bretton Woods agreement (1944), which gave national governments scope to regulate international capital flows, and provided the Australian state with political and economic space to pursue its nation-building agenda (Tanner 1999:64–5).

This postwar stability was also based on state-sponsored industrial growth through infrastructural projects and 'protected industrialisation' (Catley 1996:53–61). This growth would generate the full employment missing from the prewar era, which in turn would absorb the growing supply of consumer goods, thereby avoiding the problems of overproduction and underconsumption experienced prior to World War II. In this way, the postwar approach to nation-building sought to shore up the deficiencies of the wage-earners' welfare state. It also further legitimised the role of the union movement in economic development. During the 1950s, income distribution remained narrow, unemployment levels remained historically low and the nation experienced a sharp increase in levels of home ownership (Whitwell 1989; Hughes, B. 1980:191–3; Greig 1995). Postwar European migrants were recruited to supplement the labour force, and were encouraged to partake in the 'Australian way of life' through participating in the union movement and in this way join in the struggle for equality (Castles et al. 1992:38; Hirst 1992:203).

The structure of postwar industrial relations is illustrated on figure 9.1. At the heart of this diagram lies the state-sponsored arbitration process, which tied organised labour and employer associations to centralised wage-fixing. The results of this bargaining then flowed on to less-organised workers, while the unemployed and others outside the paid workforce were caught in the state's welfare net. This regulatory regime reached its most developed form in the period between the end of World War II and the 1970s, even though its elements were in existence at the time of Federation. (See 'Unions, elites and political equality', page 196.) As chapter 10 will demonstrate, it survived the end of the twentieth century in a truncated form.

However, during this era, the union movement remained focused on the rights of the wage-earner armed with a fair wage meeting their basic needs in the market. As O'Donnell (1999:136) argues:

Our welfare state was always seen as meaner and leaner than its western European counterparts, but our social security system operated in conjunction with a commitment to full-employment, centralised wage fixing, award coverage and

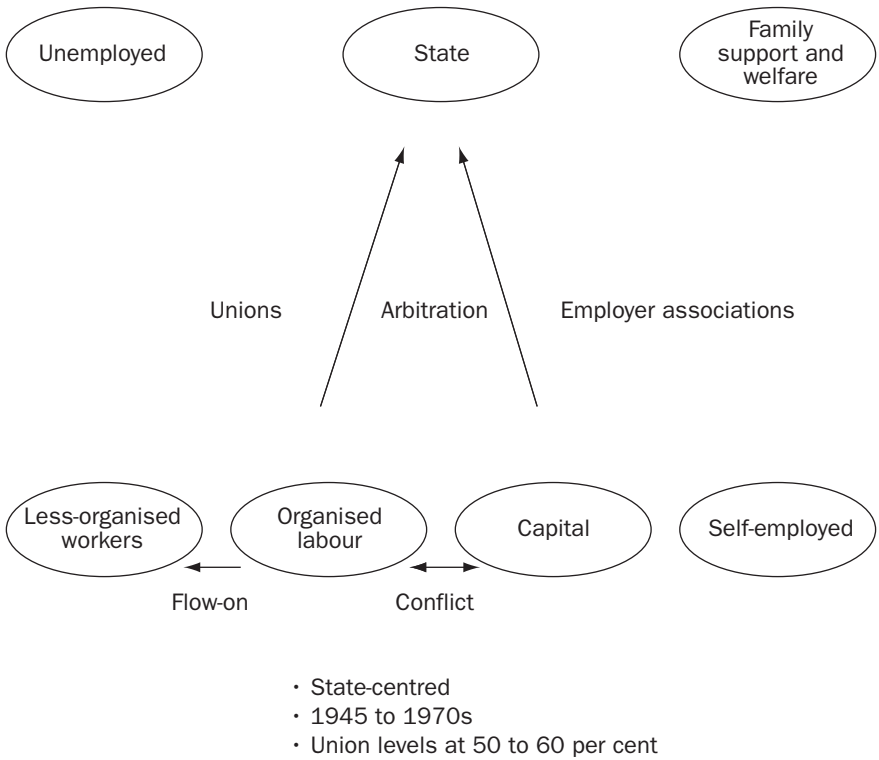


Figure 9.1 Postwar industrial regulation

widespread home ownership, amounting to what was, by world standards, a surprisingly comprehensive system of social protection. [see also Whiteford 1998: ch. 13]

Despite the ‘full employment’ generated by the postwar nation-building project, the union movement failed to address the problem of the exclusionary basis of the wage-earners’ welfare state. As Probert (1990:46–7) notes:

In placing so much faith in the ability of the wage system to provide secure living standards for the family man, Australian trade unions gave relatively little weight to broader political and social strategies for improving the welfare of the less well off.

By narrowing their political focus on wage-earners, the labour movement ignored other important constituencies that remained vulnerable to poverty:

Even in the period of full employment before 1975, those individuals and families expected to be protected by the **family wage**, by the social security system and by the male breadwinner model of social protection were the very groups most likely to be in poverty. These groups included large low-income families,

Unions, elites and political equality

Although unions performed a central role in the postwar effort to place countervailing pressure on income inequalities, other political dimensions of inequality associated with power and representation proved more intractable. Arbitration through representative bodies such as unions meant that decision-making power accumulated to those placed at the apex of such organisations. This was heightened by the creation of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in 1927, centralising union power further. Concerns were regularly voiced that rank-and-file union members were unable to participate effectively in the affairs of their union, and that decisions were transmitted from above to local officials, workplace delegates and the shopfloor. The system of arbitration discouraged independent grassroots action and placed the authority for industrial action in the hands of the apex of the union bureaucracy. The complexities of this bureaucratic arbitration system and its conciliatory objective always had the potential to generate conflict between different levels of the union movement.

This conflict could be interpreted in a number of ways. For instance, some argued that the disproportionate power wielded by union leaders reflected Michels's (1962) 'iron law of oligarchy', whereby power within any organisation tends to gravitate towards a self-perpetuating leadership. In a study of Australian elites, Higley, Deacon and Smart (1979) argued that business, political and union leaders could be described as a 'consensually unified elite', and that the horizontal bonds between these union leaders and other elites were at least as strong as those between the union elite and their members. On the other hand, there were radical critics of the union movement that also claimed that the movement's leaders were apt to 'sell out' their members. From the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (or 'Wobblies') onwards, there were socialist groups that accused the union bureaucracy of betraying the interests of organised labour and opting for class compromise (Bramble 1996).

As chapter 10 will show, these issues re-emerged in the 1980s, when the union movement reached a political agreement with the Labor Party on a series of wages and prices accords.

sole-parent families, the aged, families with an unemployed, sick or disabled breadwinner, indigenous families, and individuals and families excluded from home ownership because of labour market disadvantage or because they were headed by women. [Cass 1998:42; see also O'Donnell 1999:136]

The revitalisation of postwar Australian conservatism under Menzies was directed precisely at those 'forgotten people' who were overlooked by male-dominated unionism. Women in particular were an important grassroots organising base for the early postwar Liberal Party (Brett 1993:51–9). In the mid-1960s, Whitlam sought to broaden the electoral appeal of the ALP. However, the following chapter will reveal how this process of reform provoked fears that the party had been hijacked by new social groups and had betrayed its working-class constituents.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century a range of technological, economic and political pressures associated with the process of globalisa-

tion dismantled the postwar statist compromise between capital and labour. These global pressures are central to an understanding of the contemporary transformations of inequality within Australia. A process of state-sponsored deregulation began to transform the relationship of inequality within the labour market by removing various restrictions on employers' ability to define the terms under which their employees were hired. As Richardson (1999:4) notes, over the past twenty years, 'the weight given to egalitarian values and the perceived unfairness of relying on market-based exchange seem to have dwindled in public discourse ...'. Before exploring how these changes have affected perceptions of inequality, it is necessary to explore how various other social groups responded politically to their marginalisation within the wage-earners' welfare state. As the following two sections will reveal, structures and perceptions of inequality operate on shifting terrain, and one of the tragedies of political struggles against inequality is that as a movement approaches its original goal, the ground invariably shifts and goals must be revalued. It is hard to keep your eyes on the prize of equality.

The struggle for gender equality

The Federation compromise between labour and capital not only charged the liberal-democratic state with the responsibility for settling disputes through arbitration, but also enshrined fairness as the guiding principle of industrial decision-making. For most of the ensuing century, organised labour tied itself to this institution. However, the fairness enshrined in the principles of arbitration was based on gendered assumptions concerning the roles of men and women in the project of nation-building. Unions fought for the right of *men* to have steady employment and a fair and reasonable wage. Furthermore, as we pointed out in chapter 2, women's bodies are socially constructed as 'weaker' than those of men. As a result, sex discrimination was 'a blind spot of the labour movement' (Ryan and Rowse 1975:30). While women were encouraged to perform paid employment designated as 'women's work', their principal function consisted of maintaining, reproducing and expanding the national stock through their central role within the nuclear family (Baldock 1988:49). As a result of this sexual division of labour, women were relegated to the private sphere while men colonised the public world.

The construction of strict dichotomies between public and private, paid work and housework, production and consumption undermined gender equity from the beginning of Federation. This ongoing struggle against gender inequality has widened the horizons of public debate beyond the issue of income and pointed to the binding connections between paid and unpaid work.

This struggle will remain incomplete if women are expected to compete with men while shouldering primary responsibility for domestic work. The values people attach to different spheres of their lives affect how social inequalities are perceived. This section examines how women ‘played the state’ (Watson, S. 1990) in their effort to secure a more equal relationship with men, and outlines the ‘long and slow’ struggle to obtain full citizenship rights (Weeks 1996:85).

The view that women should confine themselves to the domestic sphere and child-rearing only began to emerge with the beginnings of industrialisation and modern capitalism, paradoxically at the same time that women were increasingly competing with men for the same jobs. Prior to this, the family tended to be the principal unit of production, especially in agricultural societies (Probert 1989:91–3). In most pre-capitalist societies, there was less distinction between the world of work and the world of family. The advent of large-scale commercial agriculture and the rise of industrialisation gradually broke the nexus between the family and work.

As the Industrial Revolution accelerated, technological and organisational innovations within the workplace reduced workers’ skills while increasing their efficiency. As competition among workers increased, workingmen began to look upon women with distrust and used their organisational strength to limit entry into particular sections of the workforce. As Frankenburg (quoted in Baldock 1988:25) notes:

men reacted to exploitation by fighting not as a class against capitalism, but as a gender group against women – or rather within a framework of sex solidarity against specific women chosen and caged for this express purpose.

Domesticating gender inequality in Australia

During the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, at a time when the majority of the poor were female, especially women with dependants (Roe 1988:2), a series of other campaigns reinforced the gendered segregation of work or the exclusion of women from various occupations. These campaigns curtailed women’s financial independence, institutionalising what Summers (1994) called ‘the poverty of dependence’.

Colonial Factory Acts, such as those passed in Victoria in 1873, 1885 and 1895, occupied unionists and moral reformers during the second half of the nineteenth century (see Macintyre 1985:42–4). From a humanitarian perspective, these Factory Acts were designed to improve the appalling conditions under which workers laboured in factories, and to prohibit the use of domestic dwellings to ‘take in’ factory work. Focusing on ‘the sweated trades’, such as

the clothing industry, reformers sought minimum safety standards and restrictions on the working hours of women and children. However, the attitudes of the reformers reflected assumptions that women were incapable of withstanding the rigours of the modern labour market. In the 1873 Victorian Parliamentary debates, one supporter of reform noted:

To say that needlewomen, or other females employed in factories, should have the liberty of making a contract ... was simply to say that they should have the liberty of starving ... It was consequently necessary for the legislature to interfere and protect them.

This was reiterated in the 1895 debates, where one member stated that

the Government do not propose in any way to regulate the employment of adult male labour ... Its object was in helping those who cannot help themselves – the young children and the women. [Macintyre 1985:42–4]

One consequence of such legislation was to protect male jobs by reducing the attractiveness of employing women. Women were viewed by reformers as vulnerable to exploitation from unscrupulous contractors, and this in turn undermined male factory employment and decent wages. Women were, in effect, unfair competition.

This withdrawal of women's labour also increased the time women potentially could spend on domestic duties. As Macintyre (1985:45) observed:

Whenever humanitarians and moral reformers considered the problems of the labour market, this distinction between the public and the private spheres loomed large. Their task was to preserve the sanctity of the home and family, and to rescue vulnerable family members from the pernicious effects of the market.

These legislative reforms in paid employment at the turn of the century had the effect of protecting men's jobs and their domestic privileges through reinforcing the notion of a separate public sphere of work for men and a domestic sphere for women (Kingston 1977).

If nation-building delegated to men the responsibilities in the field of production, then women's role was increasingly defined as one of reproducing the national stock. Factory reform at the turn of the century overlapped with a prevailing alarm that women were not fulfilling their domestic responsibilities and were neglecting their child-rearing responsibilities. During the first decade after Federation a moral crusade developed around the fear of declining birthrates in Australia. As pointed out in the previous chapter, one of the cornerstones of post-Federation nation-building was the commitment to a White Australia Policy. This ruled out population expansion and labour competition from non-European immigration sources. Under these conditions, the project of white nation-building was in danger of being undermined unless women

devoted more attention to producing and rearing the future white labour force (Reiger 1991:13). This placed an added stigma on white women who remained committed to the paid workforce rather than the domestic sphere (Burns 1983:52; Gilding 1992: ch. 5). Weeks (1996:70) has also noted how the embryonic wage-earners' welfare state was 'constructed around families, with a silent but entrenched division of labour'.

Movements for women's equality at the turn of the century tended to embrace the imperial goals of nation-building inherent within the Federation project, partly due to the political advances Australian women achieved in the field of citizenship. Two significant symbols of citizenship that Australian women acquired before those elsewhere were the right to vote and the right to stand for and sit in parliament: 'Enfranchised and rendered eligible to stand for national political office ... white Australian women were pleased to define an identity of interest between themselves and the new nation' (Lake 1997:80). These measures of political equality, achieved in 1902, drew attention away from the reality that women's rights were circumscribed elsewhere in the arena of paid work, and were restricted to white women. Feminists spoke at international conferences with a feeling of optimism in the possibilities of an Australian civilisation free of gender inequality (Lake 1997:81-4). This political optimism gradually dissipated as women found it more difficult to exercise their right to sit in parliament. It took two decades before the first woman was elected to a state parliament, more than forty before a woman was elected to Federal Parliament, and almost ninety years before a woman became a state premier.

The Federal arbitration system reinforced the separation of roles for men and women by embedding 'fairness' within the concept of a family wage – one sufficient to allow a man to be the sole breadwinner for a household. This was the gendered implication of the 1907 Harvester Judgement brought down by Higgins and the Arbitration Court. This framework assumed that women in paid employment had no dependants and/or could live on less than a living wage (Kingston 1977:140). This was explicitly stated in the 1912 Mildura Fruit Pickers' Case, where Justice Higgins opined that: 'Fortunately for society, the greater numbers of breadwinners are still men. The women are not all dragged from their homes to work while the men loaf at home.' As Encel (1971:55) observes, Higgins's 'devotion to the principle of equality stopped short of equality between men and women'. It took until 1919 for the Arbitration Court to adopt a standard minimum wage for women, in a case concerning the clothing trades, an industry numerically dominated by low-paid women. This standard was set at 53.8 per cent of the male basic wage (Ellam 1988:109-10). Thus it was ironic, as Macintyre (1985:56-8) notes, that for much of the twentieth century, 'the principle of the living wage was used to deny equal pay'. This system took for granted female dependency and implic-

itly recognised a dual form of citizenship, the citizen-worker and the citizen-mother (Roe 1988:7).

Women were able to struggle for improvements within their sphere of this dual system of citizenship, such as the 'baby bonus' (1912), the war widow's pension (1914) and child endowment, first introduced in New South Wales in 1926. Even so, the reforms achieved were consistent with the population imperative behind the nation-building agenda. They 'reflected and advanced dominant imperial concerns with national efficiency and race propagation' (Roe 1988:7). However, during the interwar years, feminist identification with white Australian nationalism and the 'group heritage' dwindled as a result of a combination of factors, including disillusionment with women's political advancement and a growing outspokenness on male depredations against black Australians and colonial despoliation in general (Lake 1997:83, 90). Despite their early political gains, Australian women fell behind other industrial countries with respect to access to higher education and the professions (Encel 1971:54).

Economic and military contingencies helped destabilise barriers between men's work and women's work and the relationship between the domestic and the public sphere of work. As men were recruited for the military effort during World War II, women were asked to perform roles that they had previously been denied access to, in areas such as heavy industry and agriculture. Between 1939 and 1944, the number of women in full-time employment increased threefold (Baldock 1988:26).

However, women's roles continued to be packaged as a set of subordinate relationships to men. It was made clear that women were performing these new roles to assist the collective male fighting overseas (McMurchy, Oliver and Thornley 1983: ch. 6). Prime Minister Curtin declared that 'all women employed under the conditions approved shall be employed only for the duration of the war and shall be replaced by men as they become available' (quoted in Baldock 1988:37; see also Ryan and Rowse 1975).

This postwar return to the role of the citizen-mother was also assisted by the Re-establishment and Employment Bill (1945), which guaranteed male service personnel their previous employment and gave preference to servicemen in the labour market (Baldock 1988:38). Furthermore, wartime creches established to help women with children meet their dual obligations were disbanded. To discourage further women's retention in paid employment, the average wartime female wage rate of 90 per cent of a male rate was reduced to 75 per cent, a rate fixed finally in 1950 by the Arbitration Court, which ruled that 'it was socially preferable to provide a high wage to the male because of his social obligation to fiancée, wife and family' (quoted in Baldock 1988:39). Justice Foster's rationale for gender discrimination, this time in the face of

The deconstruction of wartime gender divisions

During the war, the media and its advertisers performed a crucial propaganda role, not only against the Axis threat, but also in terms of repackaging femininity for the war effort (Bonney and Wilson 1983: ch. 7). During the war, magazines such as the *Australian Women's Weekly* stressed the rewards and privileges of being a factory worker. Prior to the war, the magazine rarely discussed the realm of employment, an area assumed to be an integral part of the public sphere of men. Established during the early-1930s Depression, it had stressed the role of women as mothers, carers, nurturers of the family and managers of the private spheres of life.

Furthermore, even the positions available to women in the military revealed that job segregation had not been abandoned during the war effort. Advertisements encouraging women to enlist in the Australian Women's Army Service announced: 'You can do a REAL job ... A MAN'S JOB' (*Australian Women's Weekly* 24 October 1941). The positions listed as suitable for women included ambulance drivers, draughtswomen, stenographers, motor drivers, clerks, cooks, telephonists, wireless telegraph operators, book-keepers, machine operators, typists, waitresses and orderlies.

As the war drew to a close, the media reverted to the prewar packaging of femininity, once more stressing women's role as nurturer, mother and housewife. These positions again were presented as 'natural roles', and the magazine stressed that the postwar husband (returning from war) would not tolerate anything but a reversion to traditional roles, now emphasised as the rational and natural way to organise society. In the postwar period, the media and advertisers relentlessly promoted this notion of the home-centred mother and housewife. While the war was in progress, experts had emphasised that women's more delicate fingers were excellent for dexterous factory work. However, after the war, experts stated that women tended to be more careless at work and had a narrower concentration span. At the same time, child experts stressed that the psychological well-being of the postwar child would be compromised unless they received around-the-clock attention from their mother (Bonney and Wilson 1983:226-7; Ryan and Rowse 1975:29; Game and Pringle 1979:9).

union opposition, bore all the hallmarks of Higgins's prejudice. By 1953, women's organisations were presenting their views before wage cases.

Despite women's experiences throughout 'the duration', by 1954 women's overall employment participation rate had risen by fewer than 3 percentage points, to 30.5 per cent, compared to 1933 (Baldock 1988:26). However, this overall participation rate hid other dimensions of women's participation. In the immediate postwar period, a growing number of Australian-born women left paid employment, while a growing number of recent migrants from southern Europe entered the workforce. These women were recruited into manufacturing positions, especially within the consumer sector, such as clothing and food.

The postwar period also coincided with the 'baby boom', in which Australian-born women, having withdrawn from the paid workforce, married younger than women in previous generations and increased the fertility rate to a level that was unprecedented this century (McNicholl 1991: ch. 4). The media

portrayed the ideal woman as a wife and home-centred manager of the domestic realm, a contented consumer and willing servant to the male breadwinner, and a receiver of expert modern opinion. As noted in the previous section, this was also the citizen-mother that Menzies appealed to as part of the 'forgotten people', who were alienated from the male-dominated public arena of unionism and paid work. However, the improvements in average Australian standards of living in the 1950s and the identification of 'the Australian way of life', discussed in the previous chapter, were achieved through returning women to the role of citizen-mother rather than widening their citizenship rights within the world of paid work. As Game and Pringle (1979:4) point out:

The boom conditions following World War Two enabled a sizeable proportion of the working class to achieve the ideal of home ownership and a privatised family life in the suburbs ... The myth of egalitarianism springs from the reality of a comfortable standard of living, based on a close-knit family unit and high levels of home ownership. [see also Ryan and Rowse 1975; Gilding 1991: ch. 8; Murphy 2000: ch. 14]

Thus, despite the rising standards of living that the average Australian household experienced during the 1950s, including rising levels of home ownership and the accumulation of household consumer durables, Australian society retained a gendered segmentation of public and private lives. The legal, industrial and ideological structures of post-Federation nation-building sanctioned unequal employment opportunities between men and women (Probert 1989:100). Between Federation and the 1950s, as noted above, there had been little progress on the institutionalised assumption that women were dependent on men and that women themselves had no dependants. Women breadwinners were thus forced to survive on lower incomes than men. Furthermore, women of certain status, such as married women, were discriminated against. The *Public Service Act 1902* (Cwlth), which placed a marriage bar on women, still remained in force throughout the 1950s and many employers refused to accord married women permanent-employee status (Ford 1970:114–15).

The 'dual' nature of post-Federation citizenship, where the male citizen-worker complemented the citizen-mother, also reinforced the dichotomy between the public world of paid work and civic responsibilities (assumed to be the preserve of men) and the private world of domestic responsibilities. Where women entered the paid workforce, their full participation was often constrained by the widespread assumption that most domestic duties were 'women's work'. This placed women in a double bind, where the labour required for paid employment was added to the labour required for unpaid domestic work. Even among those political groups that struggled for an egalitarian society and the overthrow of the unequal order of capitalism, there often

remained an unquestioned assumption that the political struggle remained principally the domain of men, and that women's role remained supportive, as suggested by Inglis's autobiography, *The Hammer & Sickle and the Washing Up* (1995; see also Gollan 1980:328). The personal and the political remained relatively discrete fields, segmented by gender, before the 1960s.

Furthermore, the labour market itself remained segmented. Women were disproportionately found in those sectors where pay was lowest, working conditions and occupational health and safety standards were poorest, where few qualifications were required, where opportunities for job advancement were least likely, where job autonomy was most restricted, and where security was less available, stability less guaranteed, and casual and part-time employment predominated. This segment of the 'dual labour market' has been labelled the 'secondary labour market', as opposed to the 'primary labour market', where men – although by no means the majority of men – predominate. In periods of growing unemployment, such as the 1930s, male-dominated unions endeavoured to push back any encroachments women had made in broadening employment options, often making them scapegoats as the cause of higher unemployment (Fox and Lake 1990:156; McMurchy, Oliver and Thornley 1983: ch. 5). For most of the twentieth century the union movement sought to obtain the conditions of the primary labour market for its members. However, until the 1960s, this primary labour market remained the meeting place of men.

From citizen-mother to citizen-worker

Women's overall participation rate in paid work began to increase significantly during the 1960s, by 1970 was almost 40 per cent, and reached 54 per cent by 1995 (Andrews and Curtis 1998:172). While married women made up only 7 per cent of the workforce in 1954, by 1988 this had increased to 26.3 per cent (Gunn 1999; see also Edgar 1988:444). In explaining this growth Baldock (1988:50–1) stressed 'pull' factors, such as the growing labour requirements of capital and the state:

The entry of women in the paid labour force during war years and again – but under different conditions – in the 1960s was not a concession to women's demands but instead a direct response to the needs of labour power in private enterprise and public service.

On the other hand, some commentators have focused on 'push' factors, such as the growing family requirements for two incomes in order to afford housing, mass consumption and mass leisure (Weeks 1996:72). For instance, Game and Pringle (1979:12) state that by the 1960s 'women increasingly had to leave the

“nest” because a second income was required to cover consumption needs’. More importantly, they point to the role that this shift implied for gender relations on a wider scale:

This posed a threat to the balance of power within the family, since inequality becomes more visible as women perform two jobs. The shortening of women’s child-bearing years, and their presence in the workforce in large numbers potentially challenges the sexual division of labour outside as well as inside the home. [Game and Pringle 1979:12]

In other words, higher levels of workforce participation by women challenged the ‘poverty of dependence’ through increasing the possibility of financial independence from men, and raised questions surrounding the extent of male participation in domestic responsibilities.

Baldock (1988:33) acknowledges that women’s political campaigns were a third reason for women’s higher rates of workforce participation: ‘Although economic factors seem to be crucial in explaining the changes in policy, in each case women’s rights groups and trade unions have played an important role in lobbying for change.’ While the labour requirements of employers and the state help account for the quantitative changes in women’s employment, women’s rights groups have fought on a qualitative level to determine the conditions under which women are engaged in the labour force, and to extend the boundaries of available work opportunities.

The struggle against wage inequality advanced in 1969 when test cases before the Arbitration Commission granted equal pay for women whose work was of the ‘same or like nature’ to men’s work. This decision was the culmination of various campaigns initiated in New South Wales in 1958. However, there remained a high degree of formality to this equal-pay ruling, despite its importance as a symbolic recognition of equal rights. The ruling concluded by stating that ‘equal pay should not be provided ... where the work in question is essentially or usually performed by females but is work upon which male employees may also be employed’ (quoted in Encel 1971:60). Given the highly gendered and segmented nature of the labour force, it was estimated that this ruling affected only 18 per cent of women workers (Niewenhuysen and Hicks 1975:78). The restricted nature of this equality was further addressed in 1972, when the Arbitration Commission ruled that women should receive ‘equal pay for work of equal value’ (Baldock 1988:40; Burton 1991:150–2). The gender discrimination that lay at the basis of the concept of a ‘family wage’ outlined by Justice Higgins in 1908 was finally overturned.

However, practical problems with applying this new conception of gender equality remained. The difficulty lay in determining which comparisons to use when assessing the different types of work that men and women continued to

be employed in, and how 'equal value' could be calculated when comparing different work. The historic gendered division of labour made these problems central to future struggles for wage equality. One problem with the concept of value was that historically 'women's work' had been stigmatised and devalued as less important and less skilled than 'men's work'. For example, within the clothing industry, while male-dominated areas such as cutting and marking were regarded as skilled occupations that demanded 'prior training', female-dominated jobs, such as sewing-machine operation, were considered unskilled or seen as natural talents that women possessed prior to employment, and therefore as requiring little or no training. Thus, almost thirty years after the 1972 ruling, Bryson (2001:102–3) noted that the concept of equal value is still 'not recognised and in those occupations concerned with caring and domestic types of services and which are predominantly female, pay rates remain low'.

Attempts have been made to introduce the notion of 'comparable worth' to overcome occupational segregation. Government bodies, retaining the role of umpire, can compare typically male with typically female jobs involving similar training and similar responsibilities. This was attempted by comparing nurses and ambulance drivers in the 1980s, child-care workers and car mechanics in the 1990s, and librarians and other public-service professionals in the new millennium (Probert 1990:102; Baldock 1988:41; *Australian* 1 April 2002). However, some commentators argue that the determination of comparative worth is highly subjective and replaces the 'impersonal forces of the market with the discretions and determinations' of government officials (Moens and Ratnapala 1992:97; Hughes, H. 1998). Furthermore, they claim that drawing women's wages into line with 'similar' male-dominated occupations reduces the employment opportunities of many low-paid women and only benefits 'certain sub-groups of female workers at the expense of other female workers as well as non-working women and some categories of male workers' (Moens and Ratnapala 1992:96). These controversies demonstrate the extent to which 'fairness' and 'the market' have remained contentious forces and contested concepts within the politics of Australian inequality since Federation.

In 1974, as a consequence of the Federal Government's ratification of the International Labour Organisation Convention 100 on the right to equal pay for work of equal value, the lowest-paid women in the workforce were granted the same minimum wages as men. Once again, while the ruling attacked another form of gender discrimination, its effect was to highlight other dimensions of gender inequality. For instance, the ruling did not take into consideration a range of 'extras' that tend to flow more towards men than women, such as over-award rates, overtime and other bonuses. These discrepancies are often associated with the higher level of domestic responsibilities women assume, or with discrimination at the workplace or in the job market.

Legislative changes were also made during this period, either to encourage the participation of women in the workforce or to eliminate discrimination against them. For instance, the marriage bar in the public service was lifted in 1966, and in 1972 the Federal Child Care Act was a recognition that women's participation in the workforce was hindered by the double bind of domestic responsibilities and paid work (Weeks 1996:76). This was also recognised in the Federal Government's National Maternity Leave case in 1979. In 1984, following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Inequality against Women, the Hawke Labor government introduced the Sex Discrimination Act (Weeks 1996:77). Two years later, this was followed up by the Affirmative Action Act, requiring employers to lift barriers to women's career prospects, actively seek out women where few are employed and reform management practices. Companies that failed to comply with this legislation were to be named in parliament and considered ineligible to tender for government contracts. However, despite its intention to overcome gender inequality, some critics have argued that, like 'comparative worth', it tends to promote the prospects of mainly middle-class career women rather than unskilled working women in 'feminised' industries. Many women continue to work in fields with remote career prospects, such as sales, services and routine clerical work. Furthermore, the legislation does not cover small businesses or outworkers. These are areas of the workforce that are notoriously difficult to police and exact compliance from. For these reasons, Jamrozik (1991:96) has argued that the shift by more women into professional occupations has had the consequence of reducing gender inequality, but heightening class inequality.

Despite greater participation of women in the workforce over the past couple of decades, the renewed vigour of the women's movement and legislative change, many Australian women still experience employment disadvantages. A disproportionate number of women occupy jobs in the secondary labour market rather than the primary labour market. Women's work, on average, continues to be less well-paid, less prestigious, associated with poorer conditions, less secure and less varied. Farrer (1997:54) claims that 'Australia's workforce is the most gender-segregated in the western world', with 55 per cent of women in 1995 classified clerical and sales. However, as Janey Stone (1996:76) warns, 'while the range of options for women is limited, so is the range of options for men'. On the other hand, as Baldock (1988:32) points out, it is important to look deeper into women's participation within specific industries and examine their hierarchical relations. Claire Williams (1988) and John Western (1983:149-63) explored a range of industries and asked, for example: Who are the pilots and who are the flight attendants within the airline industry? Who are the doctors and who are the nurses within the health profession? Who are the principals and who are the schoolteachers in education? Who are the technicians? And who are the

sewing machinists and outworkers in the clothing industry? Women account for only 4 per cent of company directors (Trioli 1996:60), and in 1999 women held only 12 per cent of senior management positions in firms with more than 100 employees, while only seven out of the 500 highest-paid executives in Australia's top 150 firms are women (Weule 1999:48). Where women have entered employment sectors previously dominated by men, such as mining, they often pay a high cost for nonconformity, through isolation and harassment (Eveline 1995).

Inequality also continues to manifest itself across other employment indicators. For example, a disproportionate number of women work in either a part-time or casual capacity, whether out of choice or necessity. The fact that women tend to be the primary child-carers in a household and/or assume the burden of most domestic responsibilities makes part-time work attractive for many women (Baxter, Gibson and Lynch-Blosse 1990; Office of the Status of Women 1991). More than half of all new jobs over the past twenty years have been part-time – mainly in the secondary labour market – and around 85 per cent of all part-time workers are women. By 1996, 42 per cent of women in paid work were part-time employees (Andrews and Curtis 1998:170). This preponderance of women in casual and part-time employment helps account for some of the gender inequality in average earnings. By 2001, on average women received 68 per cent of men's total earnings. However, even if part-time and casual workers are excluded, women still only receive 85 per cent of men's full-time adult ordinary earnings (Office of the Status of Women 2001:9).

Despite formal equality, then, patriarchal relations have persisted and their strength is revealed in the shifting terms under which gender equality is fought. First, 'formal equality' has created a glass ceiling, whereby women can aspire to advance their careers but face unseen, informal barriers. As Trioli (1996:58–9) points out, most young women have embraced **feminism's** historical goal that boys and girls should have equal opportunities in life, even if many reject the feminist tag. However, this generation

has been born into a time when, in spite of her ambitions and expectations, the glass ceiling has become the new mirror into which women now vainly gaze. It is a cruel reflecting surface that shows up not only all her usual lumpiness, but the lack of the one crucial bulge that not only even the biggest shoulder pads can replace. On the other side of this looking glass, is the Wonderland of patriarchy. [Trioli 1996:58–9]

Second, as Bryson (2001:102) notes, value 'is still defined on male terms', and Weeks (1996:81) predicts that the 'social construction of progress for women will continue to be cast in relation to men's achievements and a male model of citizenship'. By struggling to extend their citizenship claims from citizen-mother to citizen-worker, women have sought social justice on men's

terms. Probert (1989:108) suggests that perhaps women should not be campaigning for male-dominated jobs. Perhaps the whole way our concept of work and paid work is organised lies at the core of gender inequality. Domestic work and paid employment are structured in such a way that there is an assumption that there is someone permanently at home caring for children, cooking meals, tending the garden, washing clothes. Perhaps the problem is the concept of a 'normal' working day and a 'normal' working week, and perhaps the distinctions between women's work and men's work, women's spheres and men's spheres, could be transformed through adopting a different ethic of work and leisure. As inequality continues to be transformed along class and gender dimensions through the slow disappearance of the full-time secure forms of employment that defined the postwar 'Australian way of life', it is possible that new relationships between men and women will emerge that challenge the values that dominated the struggle for work equality throughout the twentieth century in Australia.

The struggle for cultural equality

The initial section of this chapter described how the labour movement struggled for full employment as a means of ameliorating the structural inequality inherent within the wage relationship. Employers have always looked to secure a labour reserve to draw upon in times of expansion. The previous section explored how women's participation in the project of nation-building was extended through the struggle for equal employment opportunities and efforts to disrupt the segmented nature of the labour market. At various times during the twentieth century, women were an important labour reserve in this segmented labour market. This section examines another labour pool that the state and capital have drawn upon, namely migrants.

While women struggled throughout the twentieth century to broaden their citizenship rights within the framework of the nation-building project, non-British migrants were initially outside considerations of equality. The previous chapter noted that from Federation onwards the White Australia Policy effectively sealed off Australia from people from non-European backgrounds. Its antecedents lay in colonial legislation introduced as a result of white workers' fears that Asian and other non-white labourers were incompatible with the Australian nation-building project (Castles et al. 1992:18; Palfreeman 1967). The justification for racial exclusion varied from the 'servility' of non-white races, to their 'industriousness', and to 'scientific' pronouncements on the 'degenerative' effects of racial interbreeding and 'contamination' (Kane 1997:123–4; Tierney 1996:96; Jupp 1996:180–2).

Hancock (1945:66) argued that the White Australia Policy was ‘the indispensable condition of every other policy’ and Paul Kelly (2001:52) has argued that it is the ‘essence of national identity’. The White Australia Policy was based on the belief that non-British cultures were permanently incompatible with the aspirations of the host culture. It transcended culture by excluding those who were racially different. The White Australia Policy was enshrined in law through some of the Commonwealth’s first acts of parliament, the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (discussed in the previous chapter) and the *Pacific Islands Labourers Act 1901*, designed to bar or repatriate South Sea Islanders, many of whom had been forcibly brought to Australia to work in the pastoral and agricultural industries of Queensland. Islanders were restricted to unskilled trades and could be deported at the pleasure of the state. Furthermore, natives of Asia, Africa and the Pacific could not be naturalised. A ‘dictation’ test was selectively administered to screen out undesirable potential migrants.

However, the explicit discrimination embodied in these pieces of legislation must be seen in the context of the more ‘affirmative’ values that shaped this nation-building project, such as equality for all its *citizens* (Thompson, E. 1994:46; Blainey 2001:88–9). Through rejecting racial equality – and restricting immigration to the white race – Australia could argue that it sought a truly egalitarian society. In other words, ‘those who were granted the rights of citizenship must be admitted as equal’ (Kane 1997:126).

Up to the end of World War II, Australia became an increasingly monocultural society (Bruer and Power 1993:106). Between the depression of the 1890s and the end of World War II, levels of immigration remained low, the number of persons from Asian backgrounds dropped under 25,000, fewer than 3,000 South Sea Islanders remained, and German and Austrian migrants were banned between 1914 and 1925 (Castles et al. 1992:19; Jupp 1988:163). However, there were pockets of non-British migrants, especially Greek and Italian, in rural areas such as Shepparton, Griffith and Queensland’s north (Castles et al. 1992:20). Furthermore, the nature of monoculturalism was always contested. Australia’s relationship with the British motherland was occasionally questioned (Dunn 1984: ch. 5), and a ‘sectarian strand’ also belied the image of a seamless and conflict-free monoculture with shared and compatible values (Hogan 1987: chs 7, 8). Furthermore, during the interwar era, White Australia was forced to confront the reality that the Aboriginal population was far from a ‘dying race’. During the 1930s, state administrations began to consider how this anomaly could be assimilated into the dominant British culture (Reynolds, H. 2001: ch. 9). Because the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity was discussed in an earlier chapter, the following sections will be concerned principally with the migrant experience.

Immigration, assimilationism and nation-building

The maintenance of the White Australia Policy became more problematic in the wake of World War II as Australia embarked upon a massive and varied immigration program that eventually changed the composition of Australian society. There were two main justifications for an expansion of the immigration program: the population imperative and the economic imperative (Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart 1995:70). Labor's Minister for Immigration Calwell summed up both in August 1945 in his statement that

we cannot hold this island continent to ourselves and our descendants unless we greatly increase our numbers ... Our first requirement is additional population. We need it for reasons of defence and for the fullest expansion of our economy. [quoted in Zubrzycki 1991:119]

As noted in the previous section, no administrator held firm to the hope that white Australian women could bear the burden of the necessary population expansion. Initially, Calwell looked towards British migrants. However, by 1947 it had become clear that the population imperative could not be reached on this basis alone and consequently government officials began to search further afield, geographically and culturally. The first large intake of 82,000 non-British migrants disembarked in 1947, consisting of 'displaced persons' (DPs) from the former Baltic states. By 1953, this program had accommodated 171,000 DPs and had been extended to include Poles, Croats, Ukrainians, Czechs and Hungarians (Jupp 1996:183). During the following two decades, assisted immigration schemes were conducted with the Netherlands and Italy (1951), West Germany, Austria and Greece (1952), Turkey (1967) and Yugoslavia (1970).

This sharp departure from the 'purity' of prewar White Australia Policy was accepted in a bipartisan manner within the Federal Parliament. Initially, it entailed a number of political 'risks' for both major parties, considering that many Australians during the late 1940s remained fearful of a return to the high levels of unemployment that characterised the 1930s, and considering that the nation was experiencing the worst housing shortage since Federation. Furthermore, non-British migration 'was associated in the public mind with cheap labour undermining living standards of British Australians' (Zubrzycki 1991:120–1). However, as Collins (1984:4–5) points out, 'the need to fill immigration targets overrode the perceived need to maintain racial purity in Australia, as these two objectives of the postwar immigration programme were clearly incompatible'.

The extension of postwar immigration was promoted in order to provide the labour necessary for the development of the nation's industrial expansion.

Migrants were thus targeted to perform a crucial role in postwar nation-building. They were to be extended citizenship as workers but under terms dictated by the requirements of the state. The earliest intakes were obliged to sign two-year employment contracts under the direction of the Department of Labour and National Service on key national construction projects or rural work where there was little competition with Australian workers and for scarce housing (Kunz 1986; Castles et al. 1992:24). Postwar novels such as Jack Hungerford's *Riverslake* (1953) provide insight into this postwar migrant-worker milieu.

The population imperative for postwar immigration expansion rested on bolstering national defence (Collins 1992:105). The fall of Singapore in 1942 had strengthened a resolve for greater self-defence, and in the wake of the war the racial threat from the 'north' was combined with political fears of the spread of communism. In this emerging Cold War atmosphere, the Chinese Revolution of 1949 reinforced racial fears against 'the Asiatic hordes'. This political environment made the migration of non-British Europeans more palatable to wavering monocultural supporters who were concerned that Australia was an embattled outpost of western capitalist civilisation in an unstable nuclear world.

In defending mass immigration, Calwell argued that non-British Europeans would be fully assimilable, claiming that these migrants would undergo a gradual process of cultural change. First they would be 'new Australians', then full Australians and their children would be just like the British. Postwar migrants were expected to jettison their 'ethnic baggage' and adopt 'the Australian way of life' (de Lepervanche 1990:186–94). This influx of non-British migrants after the war contributed to the increased attention Australian social commentators and academics devoted to defining 'the Australian identity' discussed in the previous chapter. (See 'A moral fable for postwar assimilationism', page 213.)

The influx of non-British migrants reinforced an official affirmation of the fundamental 'Britishness' of the Australian way of life at a time when this self-perception was being challenged demographically by the influx of migrants and the growing global reach of US military and cultural power (Watson, D. 2001:1–23). In 1948, Robert Menzies remarked that:

The boundaries of Great Britain are not on the Kentish coast but at Cape York and Invercargill. If our great empire is only a thing of fragments, then we must discuss migration quite differently. If it is in reality a living and breathing and everlasting unity, then we will no more question the movement of people from England to Australia than we would question a movement of people from Yorkshire to Somerset. [quoted in Hughes, R. 1996b]

As late as 1969, Minister for Immigration Snedden continued to state this monocultural desire:

A moral fable for postwar assimilationism

The ideal assimilationist experience was depicted in the 1959 bestselling novel *They're a Weird Mob*, where the Italian hero Nino Culotta overcomes the experience of cultural difference upon arrival and gradually adapts to 'the Australian way of life'. The novel was a moral fable that gave voice to the government's official view of the ideal transition (Bolton 1993:107). In this fable, it was in the best interests of society that the migrants shed their original culture and adopt that of the host culture. Furthermore, even though there may be a few (humorous) misunderstandings and difficulties along the way, each migrant chosen for immigration could, with a bit of hard work and individual effort, partake in the fruits of nation-building. The hosts were only too pleased to lend a hand. By the end of the novel, Nino, with a suburban home and an Australian wife, looks condescendingly at his fellow Italians who cling to their home culture and language.

This monocultural image of the Australian way of life was based on a narrow perception of British culture that assumed a seamless society without major fault-lines. By the mid-1960s many Australians found this official presentation of the Australian way of life stifling, obsolete and pretentious, and were ready to rebel against it. It was this culture that Barry Humphries (1992) started to lampoon during the 1950s in his characters Edna Everage and Sandy Stone (see also Riemer 1992; Ker Conway 1989).

We must have a single culture. If immigration implied multicultural activities within Australian society, then it was not the type Australia wanted. I am quite determined we should have a monoculture with everyone living in the same way, understanding each other, and showing the same aspirations. We don't want pluralism. [quoted in Collins 1992:109–10]

Assimilationism shaped all governmental services during the 1950s, from health and law to education and welfare. There were few provisions for translation and no bilingual services or special resources to help overcoming settlement problems (Collins 1992:111, 126; Zubrzycki 1991:127). As Jean Martin (1982:44) observed, government policy assumed that migrant assimilation depended upon 'the goodwill of individual migrants and individual Australians' and that it breached 'the egalitarian ethos of the society for migrants, as migrants, to be given any unique privileges'. This individualist approach to assimilation found its expression in annual Citizenship Conventions and the Good Neighbour Movement initiated by the government in 1950 in the hope that 'by co-opting community organisations and voluntary workers in all states and territories, it would relieve itself of the burden of meeting migrants' settlement needs' (Jordens 1995:83).

Despite this formal appeal to an egalitarian ethos, discrimination assumed various guises against non-British migrants. Unlike British migrants, they had to wait five years before being eligible for naturalisation. Public-housing restrictions also meant that they were forced to remain in migrant hostels or

find rental accommodation in inner-city slums during the postwar housing shortage (Jordens 1995: ch. 4; Greig 1995: ch. 2). Authorities often refused to recognise qualifications obtained in non-British-speaking countries, leading to widespread downward social mobility among many migrants (Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart 1995:82–6). Furthermore, these migrants were found in disproportionate numbers among low-status occupations because Australia's motivation for attracting them was to increase the source of manual labour for a rapidly growing industrial manufacturing base and for infrastructural projects (Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart 1995:72).

However, by the early to mid 1960s, assimilationism came under growing pressure on the basis of both expediency and principle (Markus 2001:16–17). Studies revealed a disproportionate level of low educational achievement among people of non-English-speaking background. Although adult language classes had been established during the 1950s, the special needs of migrant children were not recognised by state or Federal governments until 1967 (Kalantzis and Cope 1984:88–90; Martin, Jean I. 1982:38). Furthermore, commentators who 'discovered' poverty in the mid-1960s noted that migrants were locationally disadvantaged and over-represented in poverty (Stubbs 1966: ch. 9; Henderson, Harcourt and Harper 1970: ch. 8). Jupp (1966:158–9) also challenged assimilationist assumptions, suggesting that migrant disadvantages could reproduce inequality rather than recede through time. The nation-building project was also imperilled by growing difficulties faced by the Immigration Department in attracting more migrants. Furthermore, the departure rate rose alarmingly during the 1960s as conditions improved in Western Europe, turning this former source of migration into a competitor as a destination for potential migrants (Collins 1992:112).

In addition, by the 1960s various migrant communities were beginning to mobilise politically and industrially (Zubrzycki 1991:127; Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988). Also, in the wake of the Nazi experience, many Australians felt increasingly uncomfortable basing their nation-building project upon racial foundations (Kane 1997:127). The White Australia Policy was also criticised by the Immigration Reform Group (1960:viii), which began as a study group and released a proposal for the dismantling of the White Australia Policy in 1960. Acknowledging that nation-building had been built upon the White Australia Policy since Federation, the group argued that every 'legitimate aim' of the policy 'can be achieved without depriving ourselves of all non-European migrants, and without our bearing the international stigma of having raised a migration bar based on colour'. There was also a growing concern that the White Australia Policy was damaging Australia's regional trading potential with independent Asian nations (Kelly, P. 2001:72).

In 1966, the Holt Coalition government modified the White Australia Policy to allow a limited non-European migrant intake and accepted that assimilation required a transitional period and governmental assistance. The retention of 'cultural baggage' was now accepted as inevitable in the initial phase of settlement, though ultimately it was expected that 'ethnicity' would disappear, especially among second-generation migrants. Ethnic resources were necessary as a transitional bridge between the old environment and the new (Zubrzycki 1991:127–31). More government resources went into meeting this goal, and migrant disadvantages were recognised as socially harmful.

Multiculturalism, equality and difference

As we pointed out in chapter 6, the Whitlam Labor government scrapped the last vestiges of the White Australia Policy in 1973 and introduced a new bipartisan consensus labelled 'permanent ethnic pluralism', defined as the right of each cultural group to maintain 'its own communal life and preserve its own cultural heritage indefinitely, while taking part in the general life of the nation' (quoted in Jupp 1997:134). This eventually became **multiculturalism**, the concept explored in some depth in chapter 6. Distinct cultural groups were encouraged to celebrate their differences and promote their dress, cuisine, religion and language. Ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism replaced monocultural homogeneity. This rejection of discrimination on the basis of race in immigration policy was followed in 1975 with the Racial Discrimination Act, extending 'the rhetoric of Australian egalitarianism ... to citizens of all backgrounds' (Kane 1997:118).

Multiculturalism emerged during this period partly as an acknowledgement that government policy should reflect Australia's multicultural reality. Furthermore, many of the prejudices and fears, inherited from colonialism and fuelled by postwar international tensions, that the Australian way of life was under threat had proven unfounded after three decades of high migrant intake. One of the underlying assumptions of assimilationism was of a static, unchanging host culture, free of external influences and any meaningful interaction between the host and other cultures. However, the postwar experience demonstrated that the process not only changes the individual migrant, but that the migrant presence also changes the host culture (Li and Cockayne 1999:245).

By the late 1970s, the 'migrant presence' had begun to spread beyond demographic and cultural issues into issues of equal access to social resources. Ethnic rights were enshrined in the 1978 Galbally Report under the Fraser Liberal government. This report provided a framework for the provision of

migrant services, which included: equality of opportunity and equal access to programs and services for all Australians; the right of all Australians to maintain their culture; the recognition of the need for special programs and services for migrants to ensure equality of access and provision; and the design and operation of such programs in full consultation with migrants, emphasising self-help (Zubrzycki 1991:131).

In chapter 6 we noted that during the early to mid 1980s, governmental reviews of multiculturalism gave more prominence to the issue of equality of opportunity among different migrant groups than to the right to cultural self-expression (Australian Council on Population and Ethnic Affairs 1982; Jupp 1986; Markus 2001:29). Areas that were targeted included the labour market, occupational health and safety, migrant women and aged care (Zubrzycki 1991:133). These reviews shifted the focus of settlement policies from lifestyle to life chances and emphasised (the lack of) opportunities to participate equitably in all areas of social life (see Jayasuriya and Cook 1988:175). Jupp (1986) defined multiculturalism as ‘a liberal policy aimed at the integration of immigrant minorities and their equitable treatment’.

The issue of equity was further complicated during the 1980s through changes in the conception of the nation-building project. The ‘population imperative’ behind the postwar immigration program was challenged by environmental concerns that the carrying capacity of the land had been grossly overestimated by previous generations, provoking cries of ‘populate and perish’ (Birrell, Hill and Nevill 1984). Furthermore, the ‘economic imperative’ of the project was challenged as unemployment began to rise from the mid-1970s onwards. In addition, as the following chapter will show, technological change and the structural adjustment of Australian industry hit hard those areas of employment where non-English-speaking migrants were disproportionately employed.

These challenges to the population imperative and the economic imperative of immigration occurred at a time when the composition of Australia’s migrant intake was changing. The first mass non-European intake arrived during 1977–78 in the form of Vietnamese refugees, many of whom arrived as part of an internationally coordinated agreement or came unannounced, as ‘boat people’. Between 1975 and 1995, 190,000 Indo-Chinese settled in Australia, and 4 per cent of Australians were of Asian background by 2001. The following chapter will discuss how this shift in composition has affected political debates on equity and identity.

Commentators remain divided over the impact of postwar migration on Australian inequality. On the one hand, some point to the upward mobility that was afforded Australian-born workers through bringing in non-British migrants ‘at the bottom of the labour market’ (Castles et al. 1992:24; see also Jupp 1996:185). On the other hand, this upward mobility reinforced the seg-

mented nature of the labour market (Castles et al. 1992:26; Tierney 1996; Collins 1984:11–12) and, according to some commentators, created a white ‘aristocracy of labour’ (Collins 1975) and a ‘supplementary labour force’ (Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart 1995:86–7). Collins (1984:13) argues that postwar immigration increased the numerical strength of the working class in an ‘uneven’ manner, making it ‘much more divided and much less homogeneous and united than before the migrant influx’. This analysis might confirm the worst fears of early leaders of the labour movement.

However, Lever-Tracy and Quinlan (1988:38) argue that ‘the ethnic segmentation of the workforce has not divided working class struggle in Australia’ (see also Tierney 1996). A more optimistic stance has been adopted by Birrell and Seitz (1986), who point to higher levels of educational attainment and upward mobility among second-generation migrants. However, Castles et al. (1992:33–6) have qualified their findings, pointing out that many migrants often suffer downward mobility in the process of migration. Furthermore, as chapter 6 pointed out, studies continue to suggest that NESB migrants are over-represented in lower-paid manufacturing and construction work (Tierney 1996:100–1; Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart 1995:73) and suffer higher rates of job loss and higher unemployment rates, especially during recessions (Castles et al. 1992:29–33). In addition, many are employed in small businesses, where awards are often non-existent and collective action is difficult to pursue (Jupp 1988:180; Greig 2002).

Most commentators however, are careful to avoid overgeneralising the migrant experience. There is, as Castles et al. (1992:37 and 39) note, no ‘uniform social group’, and within any cultural group it is possible to discover polarisation ‘between those who do well and those who suffer disadvantage’. While the majority of migrants still enter the ranks of the working class, the economic imperatives of immigration have changed dramatically since the early postwar era. By the 1990s a much higher proportion of migrants were business migrants accepted into the immigration program to strengthen Australia’s competitive position within the global economy, unlike earlier days, when manual labour was required for large infrastructural nation-building projects.

A number of important issues emerged out of these attempts to redefine the aims of multiculturalism and immigration policy during the 1980s. These issues, which continued to provoke heated political responses during the 1990s, revealed the extent to which the politics of inequality had evolved since Federation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was assumed that a more equitable society could only be constructed on the basis of cultural homogeneity. During the postwar era, fears that high intakes of non-British migrants would threaten the pursuance of this egalitarian dream were allayed with assurances that these ‘new Australians’ would assimilate into Australian culture. It was assumed that this ‘assimilative sameness’ would place migrants

on an equal footing as other members of the community. Egalitarianism was based on an individualist belief that all Australian citizens, new and old, should be treated in the same manner. However, by the 1970s there was ample evidence to suggest that inequality was fostered by the failure to address problems that many migrants had faced in their role in postwar nation-building. In other words, by treating each individual Australian in the same way (formal equality), inequality can be reproduced because of the different attributes individuals and groups possess. By the end of the century, **cultural diversity** was a social reality that had to be taken into consideration in any search for a more equitable society.

A new politics of inequality at the end of the twentieth century was increasingly fought from positions based on different understandings of 'identity' and 'equality', 'ethnic rights' and 'citizenship responsibilities', and 'unity' and 'diversity'. These positions were explored earlier in chapter 6. This dilemma facing the multicultural politics of inequality was identified by the National Advisory and Coordinatory Committee on Multicultural Education in 1987 as

the need to maintain and sustain the striving for identity without sacrificing equity and justice, or jeopardising the integration of all groups in the common political and moral order of society. [quoted in Zubrzycki 1991:134]

As the next chapter notes, this problem provoked heated responses throughout the 1990s. While some commentators argued that the unique nature of different cultural groups demanded 'special programs', there were others that argued that this approach led to the dangers of 'tribalisation' and that greater equality could only be attained through mainstreaming social services and treating each individual Australian in the same way (Chipman 1980; Knopfmacher 1982; Brunton 1993). These debates concerning self-determination occurred within both multicultural and indigenous politics.

Conclusion

While chapter 8 traced the development of the egalitarian ethos in representations of the Australian identity, this chapter has examined how political struggles across a range of dimensions endeavoured to eliminate or ameliorate existing inequalities. Thus, throughout most of the twentieth century the aspirations of the Australian labour movement for a fairer relationship between labour and capital were channelled through the union structure into the parliamentary arena. This strategy had emerged out of the experiences of the 1890s depression and was advanced from Federation through to post-World War II reconstruction. As long as the era of postwar economic growth and state-

sponsored nation-building continued, as it did until the mid-1970s, the movement could claim success in ensuring that a state-determined conception of fairness overrode the pressures of the market. The wage-earners' welfare state defined the parameters within which inequality could be transformed. However, these transformations tended to remain exclusionary due to their emphasis on the male breadwinner and to union support for a White Australia.

Women therefore were forced to struggle in other political and industrial realms to reduce and eliminate various dimensions of gender inequality. As advances were made, these gains revealed further layers of legislation, discrimination and relationships that restricted gender equality. The system of state arbitration reveals that women were able to struggle within the structures created by Federation to promote equality. Even though inequality was built into the foundational structure of a family wage, the employment regulations developed out of Federation 'ultimately worked to women's advantage' as women entered the workforce in greater numbers and challenged discrimination and unequal opportunities (Bryson 2001:95–6). The centralised wage-fixing system could be transformed to assist low-paid or weakly unionised women because gains in one sector gradually filtered through to other sectors. Under a more decentralised system, each sector would have to struggle for gains on an individual workplace basis. As the structures of inequality have been transformed over the past two decades, the barrier to women's upward mobility has been characterised as a glass ceiling, accounting for discrepancies between the formal equality that parliamentary struggle has achieved, women's expectations and the persistence of gender inequality (Trioli 1996).

This chapter also traced the struggle for cultural pluralism and ethnic equality. As Jupp (1997:132) notes, ever since 1788, conflicts over identity 'have been at the core of Australian politics'. The assimilationist egalitarianism embedded in the white Australian nation-building project became more contested as the process of socioeconomic development unfolded during the second half of the twentieth century. One key problem remains how 'to reconcile diversity with the need for social and political unity, and to understand what it means now to be an Australian' (Kane 1997:118). While some commentators attempt to reconstruct or revive a more 'fixed' sense of national identity or national character, others search for a new 'civic' definition of what it now means to be an Australian, based not upon *what we are* but on *what we do* (Li and Cockayne 1999:251; Horne 2001b:18; Jupp 1997:144).

Furthermore, many of the assumptions that lay behind the nation-building project of economic nationalism during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century collapsed under the weight of international pressures during the last third of the century. The following chapter explores how transformations in global circumstances affected the parameters of the politics of inequality. In

addition, it will consider how the political struggles explored in this chapter were confronted with a backlash during the last decades of the century. These debates reinforce one of the central arguments of this book, namely that understandings and perceptions of inequality never remain static or uncontested.

Key terms and concepts

- Worker solidarity
- Wage-earners' welfare state
- Family wage
- Feminism
- Assimilationism
- Multiculturalism
- Cultural diversity

Study questions

- 1 Why has the organised workers' movement historically been antagonistic towards a free market in industrial relations?
- 2 What does Castles mean when he states that a 'wage-earners' welfare state' developed in Australia after Federation?
- 3 What has been the historical relationship between gender inequalities in domestic relationships and gender inequalities in paid work?
- 4 What social, economic and political forces shaped changes in gender relations during the twentieth century?
- 5 On what egalitarian grounds was the White Australia Policy justified?
- 6 Is it possible to reconcile cultural difference with social, economic and political equality?

Further reading

- Castles, F. 1988. *Australian Public Policy and Economic Vulnerability*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
An economic historical analysis of the development of the wage-earners' welfare state, which places Australia in comparative perspective with the historical performance of other capitalist states. It argues that the Australian way has not encouraged structural flexibility and innovation.
- Castles, S., M. Kalantzis, B. Cope and M. Morrissey. 1992. *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*. Sydney: Pluto Press.
Charts the historical relationship between the making of national identity and cultural policy from assimilation through to multiculturalism. It also explores indigenous policy and politics, as well as the evolution of racism within Australia.
- Grieve, N., and A. Burns. 1994. *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
An extensive collection of essays on Australian feminism that covers its history, theory, practice and policy implications.

Pettman, J. 1992. *Living in the Margins: Racism, Sexism and Feminism in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Explores the concept of difference as this relates to the interconnectedness of race, class and gender, and racial, sexual and feminist politics.

Probert, B. 1990. *Working Life*. Melbourne: McPhee Gribble.

An introduction to the history of work inequality in Australia that covers not only class, gender and ethnicity, but also the restructuring of the Australian economy and the impact of technological change.

Thompson, E. 1994. *Fair Enough: Egalitarianism in Australia*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

Explores the apparent contradiction in Australia between the ethos of fairness and the manifest inequalities explored in this chapter.

10 The Contested Nature of Inequality in Contemporary Australia

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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Chapter 8 began with a list of identity-related controversies that dominated Australian politics during the late 1990s. It was argued that these debates reflected conflicting understandings of the meaning and content of equality. The remainder of chapter 8 then explored how the myth of egalitarianism had evolved throughout Australian history, and in chapter 9 various struggles for equality were examined.

Having set this context, it is now possible to return to some of these debates and interpret the politics of inequality in contemporary Australia. The previous chapters highlighted three historical insights into these debates: first, 'formal' equality does not guarantee that at any particular point in time different social groups will experience similar life chances; second, preceding struggles by social movements invariably shift the parameters within which later struggles operate; and third, any set of unequal social relationships at any given time is based on a balance of political forces, rather than some natural state. These points will be reinforced in this chapter, examining contemporary changes in

the labour movement, Australia's relationship to transnational forces, the challenge of extra-parliamentary politics, and access to information. The contested nature of these transformations will be illustrated through the politics of multiculturalism, the environment and Aboriginal rights.

Unions, the state and inequality

As chapter 9 noted, until the last decade of the twentieth century the aspirations of the Australian labour movement were channelled through the union structure into the parliamentary arena. This strategy had emerged out of the experiences of the 1890s depression. From Federation through to post-World War II reconstruction and on to the Whitlam era, the labour movement could claim success in ensuring that a state-determined conception of fairness overrode the pressures of the market. The wage-earners' welfare state defined the parameters within which inequality could be transformed. Yet, the narrow conception of equality adopted by the labour movement tended to exclude those on the margins of paid employment, with its emphasis on the male breadwinner. Furthermore, the strategy tended to legitimise, though limit, the unequal power relationship between employer and employee.

However, during the last two decades of the twentieth century these boundaries of power shifted due to a range of technological, economic and political pressures associated with the process of **globalisation**. These pressures are central to an understanding of contemporary debates on inequality. Before examining their impact upon the struggle for wage equity, it is useful to explore another political project related to labour relations: 'the Accord years', between 1983 and 1996, which coincided with the globalisation of the Australian economy.

In the late 1970s, a period that in retrospect can be seen as the tail end of the postwar 'welfarist' compromise discussed in chapter 9, inflation and unemployment became twin concerns for policy-makers, producers and consumers alike. Sectors of the union movement accepted that there was a correlation between wage movements and employment rates. As a consequence, the leadership of the labour movement began to consider the feasibility of trading off wage increases for an increase in the 'social wage', or the level of government-provided universal social services (Singleton 1990:120–55).

This new strategy appeared to represent a move away from the more exclusionary 'workerist' wage-earners' welfare state approach that had dominated industrial politics since Federation. It sought to maintain the living standards of all Australians through the provision of universal social services. This strategy was at odds with the traditional role that the union movement had performed

since Federation. Rather than responding in an adversarial, reactive manner to government policy, the movement would operate more closely with government – and business – in determining broader macro-economic and micro-economic policy (Frenkel 1988:169). In February 1983, on the eve of the election that elevated Labor to power, the ALP and the ACTU reached an agreement – the Prices and Incomes Accord – that committed unions to wage restraint and the government to progressive taxation and an increase in the social wage.

The Accord evolved through a series of agreements between the union movement and the Federal Government during the thirteen years that the ALP held power. From the perspective of political participation, after a century of struggle within the parliamentary arena, it appeared as if the Accord represented the high-water mark of the organised labour movement's ascent to power. For some, it represented a transformation as significant as Justice Higgins's institutionalisation of a 'fair wage' and the postwar Keynesian commitment to full employment. Supporters of the Accord process viewed it as an epochal shift capable of tackling inequality, representing an attempt by the parliamentary and industrial wings of the labour movement to balance growth with redistribution, or 'maintain social justice as well as to maximise economic efficiency' (Cook 1992:162). Mathews (1986:179, 182) placed the Accord in broader historical perspective, arguing that it was

not only the most important development in industrial relations in Australia since the passage of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1904, but it is also a powerful engine of socialist advance ... It promotes a new type of trade unionism, one that is oriented more towards social and democratic goals than immediate wage and salary questions.

He also drew attention to the growing influence of the labour movement in determining government policy, through their participation on government boards and tripartite bodies along with government officials and employers, negotiating a wide range of social, planning and fiscal issues (Mathews 1986:187–90).

On the other hand, conservative commentators were concerned that the Accord process handed the labour movement a disproportionate share of political power. There were also radical commentators who adopted a highly critical attitude towards the Accord. Some argued that any 'corporatist' relationship between the bureaucratic union structure and the state (regardless of its complexion) placed the union leadership in a conflict of interest. By becoming too enmeshed within the agenda of the 'national interest', there was a danger that they would lose sight of their members' needs, a likelihood heightened by the existing hierarchical structure of centralised unionism (see 'Unions, elites and political equality', p. 196, chapter 9). In other words, corporatist relations would prioritise capitalist growth and efficiency at the expense of equality and

democratisation of the workplace (Triado 1984). This concern raised a more fundamental issue regarding whether (and to what extent) the union movement should involve itself in broader macro-economic policies and, if so, how it should negotiate the contradictions that potentially arise between the demands of the rank-and-file members and the so-called 'national interest'. (For an overview of debates surrounding the Accord, see Beilharz 1994: ch. 6.)

This conflict arose most clearly out of the self-imposed wage restraint that the union leadership guaranteed in order to promote 'national growth' (Bell and Head 1994:18). However, there was nothing in any of the Accord agreements that forced employers to increase their level of investment or forced them to hire more labour. There was nothing to stop them transferring profits overseas or to speculative unproductive ventures, or even to increase their levels of conspicuous consumption. Such control would trespass on the managerial prerogatives of capital, discussed in chapter 9. As a consequence, many unions and political groups became increasingly disillusioned with the Accord process. Even Prime Minister Keating expressed exasperation that the higher levels of profits delivered to business by the ALP had failed to generate higher levels of investment. In March 1994, after national account figures revealed that the profit share of national income was at a historic high while there had been a decline in investment from the business sector, he warned that if 'business doesn't start investing, the workforce will claim some of the profits back to wages' (quoted in *Canberra Times* 18 March 1994). Thus, despite the close association between the union movement and the government, many critics claimed that the Accord process had failed to defend workers' interests and had in fact strengthened those of employers, a point made by Frenkel (1988:167), who ironically noted that 'the union influence over economic decisions has helped make employers more efficient'. Thus, despite the high hopes generated by the Accord, critics saw heightening economic inequality and an erosion of political equality.

The emphasis that the Accord came to place on economic efficiency also helped transform industrial relations. By 1988, the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission had introduced the 'structural efficiency' principle, whereby unions had to commit themselves to a fundamental review of their award structure in order to obtain wage increases (Dabscheck 1994:156–61). The aim of this shift was to link wage increases to higher labour productivity. This managed decentralism of the wage arbitration system marked an important reversal of the centralised wage indexation that the union movement had fought for and maintained throughout the twentieth century on the basis of its ability to hold back the regressive consequences of the 'free' labour market. By the end of the Accord process, the principle of *enterprise bargaining* had gained ascendancy, whereby it was possible for unions to negotiate separate enterprise agreements with individual firms, representing a further move away from the equality of sameness in the name of flexibility, diversity and

efficiency. The issue that increasingly dominated industrial relations during the Accord process was whether the ‘fairness’ that had been negotiated through state-sponsored relativities during most of the twentieth century had to be sacrificed at the altar of market flexibility and the promotion of national growth and enterprise efficiency (McDonald and Rimmer 1988).

There were growing concerns that wage decentralisation and deregulation would increase inequality. For example, Bryson (2001:96) has claimed that under deregulation ‘the gap between women’s and men’s wages has widened, as have differences between women in strongly and weakly organised sections of the workforce’ (see also Women’s Bureau 1995:7; Bennett 1995). Gender inequality was heightened by other dimensions of labour-market adjustment that will be examined in greater detail in the following section. Within the segmented labour market, there has been an expansion of demand for skilled labour. While some women benefited from this transformation, there has been an even greater expansion of lower-skilled jobs in which other women remain entrapped. As Bryson (2001:89) observes, ‘just as women take up their more equal opportunities the wheels are falling off the employment system and conditions are deteriorating for many workers’. Under the Accord, the upper and lower deciles of income earners increased their proportion of income while middle-income earners found their proportion reduced. On this basis, Jamrozik (1991:133) argued that the Labor government did not aim to reduce inequality, but to alleviate poverty. Through prioritising economic efficiency over fairness, the Labor government was caught between the contradictions of a political system that embraced ‘equal rights and equal opportunities’ and an increasingly *laissez-faire* economic system that championed inequality as morally defensible and ‘economically necessary’ (Jamrozik 1991:130–1).

Paradoxically, after a decade of unprecedented influence in governmental affairs, the union movement found itself facing an unprecedented crisis, illustrated most vividly in plummeting membership numbers and industrial density during the 1990s (Harcourt 1999; Ranald 2001). These organisational and political changes were compounded by the effects of other social, economic and technological transformations associated with globalisation and **structural adjustment**. These changes would alter not only the structures of inequality, but also the political parameters within which inequality was debated.

Globalisation and inequality

As noted at the end of chapter 8, the Federal Labor government presided over the decline of the ‘Australian settlement’, the bipartisan political consensus that had anchored the Australian sense of identity to the nation-building proj-

ect for most of the twentieth century. By the mid-1980s, the number of commentators who advocated the protectionist road to national prosperity had declined. A combination of structural and ideological forces had reduced the viability and appeal of economic nationalism.

During the 1970s, the global financial architecture that had been designed around the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement for global financial stability had been dismantled. This system, which permitted national controls over currency exchange rates and foreign investment, had allowed capitalist states such as Australia to implement postwar state-sponsored nation-building projects to regulate wages, strengthen the welfare state, reduce unemployment and develop an interventionist industry policy (Capling, Considine and Crozier 1998:37–41). During the 1980s and 1990s, industrial and financial capital, loosened from national moorings, increasingly looked beyond their ‘home’ countries in order to increase their rate of return on investment. This growth in transnational capital flows was assisted by innovations in the transportation and distribution of information and products. These transformations, labelled corporate-led globalisation, opened new opportunities for companies to find cheaper sources of labour, cheaper raw materials and expanded markets (Ranald 2001; Wiseman 1998; Castells 1999: vol. 1, ch. 2).

As capital increasingly looked beyond national boundaries, national governments were forced to compete for the favours of hosting large transnational corporations in order to sustain economic growth and provide employment. To attract these powerful global corporations – many of which have annual sales that exceed the GNP of nations they bargain with (Paddon 2001) – governments must provide the right investment climate. This often leads to a process of ‘downward levelling’, a descending spiral of competition between governments to provide lower wages, better tax breaks, tighter fiscal discipline, privatisation and less onerous environmental standards. Overall, this global climate has weakened the ability of governments to arbitrate between an increasingly global capital and a locally based labour force (Capling, Considine and Crozier 1998:6–8, 42–5; Piven and Cloward 1998).

The Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s presented the shift towards state deregulation, lower protection, higher levels of privatisation and wage decentralisation as a structural imperative (Ravenhill 1994:87). They argued that for Australia to compete and meet the challenges of globalisation there was no alternative but to pursue deregulation (Edwards, J. 2000). This message was reinforced by the balance-of-payments and current-account problem the nation faced in 1986, which occasioned then-Treasurer Keating’s famous remark that unless the nation improved its import–export ratio it would descend to the status of a ‘banana republic’. According to Pusey (1991), these policy changes were indicative of an ‘economic rationalist’ shift in the ‘mind-set’ of influential

Commonwealth bureaucrats who tended to share a belief in the superiority of market forces over state regulation.

The process of globalisation, the new market-driven policy consensus and the quickening pace of technological change have combined to dramatically transform the ways in which struggles for equality have been conducted. The irony for the labour movement was that the policy framework for this more open, deregulated environment occurred at a time when its influence was historically high. As Costa and Duffy (1991:190) noted:

During the period of the Accord, the ACTU ... supported a government which has deregulated the financial system, floated the Australian dollar, reduced tariff and other forms of protection, deregulated a number of important product markets and set, as a long-term policy goal, the internationalisation of the Australian economy driven primarily by decentralised and competitive market forces.

After the demise of the Labor years and the Accord process, the new Coalition government's *Industrial Relations Reform Act 1996* further deregulated the process of state-sponsored arbitration, allowing even greater labour-market flexibility through individual agreements between individual employees and their employers. The position adopted by the Coalition government bore little resemblance to the principles that inspired Federation, which were based on high levels of protection to encourage local employment, guaranteed minimum wages and placed restrictions on the conditions under which capital could employ labour. By the end of the century, governments argued that global competition and persistent unemployment called for the removal of such restrictions on the labour market. This, it was claimed, would increase employment, even if it led to a growth in low-wage employment (Abbott 2001). From this perspective, the minimum wage does not ensure fairness for everyone, but benefits some members of society at the expense of others. Coleman and Hagger (2001:136) articulate this stance when they state that 'what a guaranteed wage does guarantee is that part of the workforce will be on the dole'.

In the wake of the Accord, business groups adopted a more aggressive approach to labour relations, calling for a perceived rebalancing of power relations away from organised labour towards individual employers through the market. The industrial legislation introduced by the Coalition expanded employer prerogatives over the conditions of employment, setting its sights on removing restrictive employment practices, such as outlawing 'secondary boycotts' (Peetz, quoted in Harcourt 1999:92–3). The Coalition claimed that these reforms facilitated international competitiveness, unshackled employers from government interference, encouraged higher levels of employment and provided workers with greater choice over conditions of employment.

Under this principle of 'choice', there were a number of relationships that bound employer and employee, including state and Federal awards; collective

agreements between individual workplaces and employers; Australian Workplace Agreements between individual workers and individual employers; and common-law contracts. Richardson (1999:22) has suggested that the move from a more prescriptive to a more flexible industrial-relations system will tilt the balance of power towards employers:

although the shift from award prescription to bargaining appears to have operated to the benefit of employees represented by strong unions, the majority of the labour force faces the prospect of working under wages and conditions determined by employers constrained only by the market and the safety net. It is difficult to foresee the future of the safety net. Subject to that uncertainty, employers will have regained much of the control which a 'free' market allows them.

Drawing on the analysis of labour-market inequality at the beginning of chapter 9, it is possible to argue that this increase in 'choice' also broadens the scope for wage inequalities as well as increasing the power of capital over labour.

The restructuring of work

Restructuring of labour-market opportunities accompanied these policy shifts by both the Coalition and the ALP. Entire sectors of Australian industry – nurtured under the postwar economic nation-building imperative – vanished from Australia's shores, or were reduced to a 'rump' servicing the local division of a global market. Even though there was a 36 per cent increase in employment between 1974 and 1994, manufacturing employment – the basis of the postwar nation-building – declined (see Schultz 1985; Peel 1995). This fall in manufacturing employment was due to the impact of labour-saving technological change, the loss of jobs to more competitive offshore locations and a relative shift in consumption patterns away from goods towards services. This sectoral transformation has led to a growth in employment within the service sector (Ranald 2001:130; Green and Wilson 2001). Furthermore, this restructuring of employment has had enormous spatial implications for inequality as industries and services relocate from depressed areas to more economically dynamic areas. Schultz (1985) has described the effect of this restructuring on the steel industry in Wollongong, while Peel (1995) has detailed the postwar fortunes of Elizabeth in South Australia by skilfully linking its industrial and structural fortunes and the way these impacted on residents' lives (see chapter 5).

According to Reich (1991: ch. 14), there are three categories of work available in this new global economy – 'routine production work', 'in-personal services' and 'symbolic-analytic work'. Routine production work typified the forms of industrial employment such as factory work that fed the Australian

union movement and encouraged high levels of union coverage throughout most of the twentieth century. However, this type of employment has declined within Australia, due to technological change and the presence of more competitive wages in other parts of the global economy. As a result, many Australian workers have found employment in the growing retailing and service sectors, often on a part-time and casual basis. These areas of in-personal services often require 'simple and repetitive tasks' and less training than routine production work, and tend to pay lower wages than other forms of employment. There remains a large, global, flexible supply of labour for routine production work and in-personal service work. At the other extreme, the global labour market rewards symbolic-analytic work, the highly valued, highly specialist services that facilitate the movement of capital and commodities across the globe. More alarming predictions have been made that this combination of automation, 'the end of work' and inequality will lead to an 80:20 world where one-fifth of the world's population would have a meaningful productive existence, while the remaining four-fifths would become superfluous (Rifkin 1996; Martin and Schumann 1997: ch. 1).

Australian evidence suggests that these structural trends have widened inequality. There has been a decline in the level of real wages, especially for those at the bottom of the wage hierarchy, while wages at the top have increased substantially (St Vincent de Paul Society 2001; Harding, Lloyd and Greenwell 2001). Long-term unemployment remains a persistent problem and there has been a growth in the proportion of the working poor. This point provides historical context for the observations in chapter 4 concerning the changing nature of employment, and those made in chapter 5 concerning the growing income gap in Australia. Richardson (1999:13) notes that this has led to a 'blurring of distinctions between households that rely on earned income and those that rely on social welfare payments' (see also Jamrozik and Nocella 1998:134–5). More women have entered the workforce, while men's participation rate has declined along with a significant increase in part-time and casual employment and self-employment. On the other hand, there are growing inequalities in the number of hours that people work, with part of the population overworked and another demanding more work. Furthermore, as more women enter the workforce, it has become more important to assess household income rather than individual income. Increasingly, households are being divided into work-rich and work-poor units (O'Donnell 1999:134–5). As Jamrozik (1991:99; see also 124–30) notes, 'the two-income family is now much more frequently encountered among families in which both partners are in white collar professional jobs'. Burbidge and Sheehan (2001:140) found that in the decade 1986 to 1996,

there was an increase of 42 per cent in couples with less than 30 hours work per week, if any, and a virtual doubling over the period of the number of such couples working 90 hours per week or more.

Gregory (1993) has also traced the decline in more secure male-dominated routine production work over the past quarter of a century in Australia. While this has been partially compensated for by a growth in the proportion of symbolic-analytical employment, there has been a much more significant increase in the proportion of low-paid in-personal service employment, leading Gregory to label this epoch as the 'disappointing decades for Australian inequality'. This 'shrinking middle' of the labour market, or 'hollowing out' of middle-level jobs, provides further evidence of growing inequality in the labour market (see also Richardson 1999:16–17; Peetz 1998). Gregory (quoted in Sherbourne and Weule 1999:42) uses the analogy of a sporting team to illustrate the receding reality of egalitarianism:

Many years ago, everyone in the team got the same wage because that was thought to generate lots of togetherness and hard work. Now the stars get more than the average players who get more than the bottom players. The spread in the sporting team has widened enormously. That sort of view of the world is spreading into all sorts of institutions.

This is nowhere more evident than in the pressures governments placed on the union movement to withstand wage increases for the lowest-paid members of the workforce on grounds of international competitiveness, while executive salaries have skyrocketed on the grounds of attracting international expertise. Defenders of this process claim that workers and executives are now playing different games:

Top salaries in the top companies are related to the investor, whereas other wages and salaries are related to productivity output, and more particularly competition in the marketplace for labour. [Ruthven, quoted in Sherborne and Weule 1999:44]

As Webber and Weller (2001:350) observe:

As the middle range jobs in the old industries disappear, and as some new professional and managerial jobs are created, so the lack of the new middle range jobs has forced many workers down the occupational hierarchy or into unemployment. This is the process by which inequality is being recreated in Australia.

In other words, while the dwindling number of employees in the primary labour market with good conditions – core workers – benefit from a more open labour market, workers in the expanding secondary labour market, especially

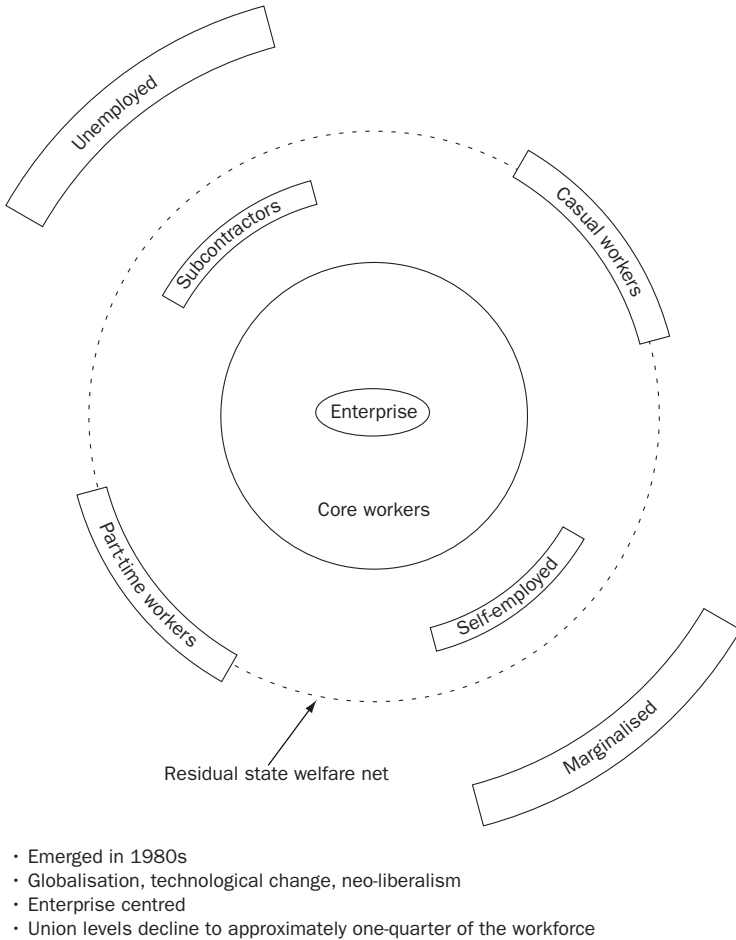


Figure 10.1 Industrial relations at the end of the twentieth century

women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and part-time, casual and young workers, are in a more vulnerable position (see Ranald 2001:129–30). These trends are illustrated in figure 10.1. Unlike figure 9.1 – which presented postwar industrial relations as a triangular relationship involving organised labour, employers’ associations and the state – contemporary industrial relations more resemble a circle, with the enterprise, rather than the state, assuming core status, while a growing proportion of the workforce becomes ‘peripheralised’. Outside this employment relationship are groups of marginalised persons targeted and monitored by the residual welfare state.

Under these conditions, the traditional union strategy of relying on the state regulation of wages and mobilising workers with lifelong secure employment has become less effective. If this path is maintained, the union movement will

Social-movement unionism as a response to globalisation

This corporate-led globalisation has led some unionists to embrace 'social movement unionism' (Ranald 2001:132–5). For example, textile, clothing and footwear unions have recognised that protectionism can no longer – if it ever did – maintain a stable local industrial workforce. The union movement has joined with other community groups and church groups and social-movement activists to bring to public attention the plight of local outworkers. In an era where market-driven forces are in the ascendancy, consumer-awareness campaigns take on additional importance as a means of modifying corporate labour practices. In Australia, by concentrating on global brand images, the FairWear campaign by unionists and community groups has pressured the NSW government to introduce anti-exploitative legislation, publicised a Homeworkers' Code of Practice, forced global companies such as Triumph to modify their global sourcing strategies, and brought public attention to outwork conditions (Greig 2002). Increasingly, these campaigns are linked globally with other struggles for workers' rights in the clothing industry. As these campaigns have developed, they have shed light on points of global corporate vulnerability. For example, Naomi Klein has noted how sensitive the global brand is to bad publicity and that the power of transnational capital over locally based labour is not absolute (Klein 2000; see also Ranald 2001:135–6).

continue to represent a declining proportion of workers. Union coverage has fallen over the past decade to only 25 per cent of the workforce (Harcourt 1999:86). The movement is faced with the dilemma that economic restructuring has threatened its very relevance, even though the need for worker protection has intensified.

Other changes have occurred within the union movement. During the 1970s, the image of unionism as manual working-class male organisational structure became more and more anachronistic as white-collar workers began to recognise the advantages of unionism. Public servants, teachers, nurses, shop employees and other service workers entered positions of power in unions. Furthermore, a higher proportion of women work in the in-personal service rather than the forms of routine production work that male-dominated industrial unionism previously relied upon. Studies reveal that women are as willing as men to join unions, but that their life experiences give them different priorities, such as 'issues of equal opportunity, equal pay, flexibility of hours, and better career paths'. These priorities reflect the ongoing struggles for equality in the labour market and the domestic front discussed in the previous chapter (Ranald 2001:131; see also Pocock 1997; Shute 1995).

Despite declining workplace coverage, unions have defended themselves against legislative changes and employer offensives by adopting a more global approach. After the Coalition came to power in 1996, claiming a mandate to reform the industrial-relations system, ACTU secretary Kelty revived images of the 1890s, threatening 'blood on the waterfront'. This threat of industrial

confrontation was realised in 1998 when the government supported a group of stevedore employers that had sacked their unionised staff and hired non-unionised labour trained offshore. The ensuing confrontation, involving lock-outs and pickets, was only resolved after a High Court's decision that the employer's strategy was illegal. Part of the strength of the counterstrategy adopted by the Maritime Union of Australia involved securing the assistance of the international union movement. As employers and governments cite international competitiveness as a rationale for encroaching upon workers' rights, unions have begun to recognise that their own survival depends upon international solidarity in order to prevent a global 'downward levelling' of wages (see 'Social-movement unionism as a response to globalisation', page 233).

While local protectionism no longer commands serious support as a means of fighting for 'wage fairness', unions are campaigning to extend global 'free-trade' agreements to include conditions of 'fair trade'. In effect, they are demanding on an international scale the same guarantees that the Australian union movement won for white workers through the federal arbitration system 100 years ago. In an era when the power of transnational capital has expanded and when the nation-state increasingly forfeits control over labour regulation, the globalisation of such an arbitration system to include 'fair international trade', and its extension to include all workers regardless of race and sex, would act as a countervailing force against local and global inequalities.

The economic and technological trends outlined in this section were not unique to Australia, but were characteristic of most advanced capitalist nations at the end of the twentieth century. However, in each nation, the weight of past policies and previous political struggles added a unique complexion to the political response to the transformations. The circumstances surrounding change have encouraged uncertainty and even hostility towards the global market among sectors of the population (Manning 2002:11). Furthermore, as the following sections of this chapter reveal, there are claims that a new cosmopolitan elite has embraced this process of globalisation, dismantled the security that many Australians found in a sense of a fixed national identity, and transformed inequality through their control over information.

Information and inequality

As noted in the previous section, globalisation and technological change have affected not only relations between corporations and nation-states, but also the rewards that accrue to different occupations. In this 'information age', symbolic analysts possess skills that are in high demand. Another transformation in work inequalities thus involves access to information required to participate

fully and successfully in the more globalised economy. Like Reich, Latham (2001:1–2) has argued that these transformations have placed additional importance on the role of educational and information policy:

Globalisation and a raft of new information technologies are changing the way we work, the way we live, the way we communicate with each other. They are bringing Australia closer to the rest of the world, at last ending the tyranny of distance ... These challenges have upgraded the importance of education. It is the one public policy which can deliver both economic efficiency and social equity.

According to Latham (2001:7), inequalities will intensify unless governments address educational reform. At a national level, inaction will lead to a further decline in Australia's international competitiveness. At the global level, as international competition becomes more knowledge intensive, the gap will widen between information-rich and information-poor citizens, allowing some members of society to participate in the new economy while leaving others behind (Latham 2001:13).

Along similar lines, Tanner (1999:70) argues that economic privilege 'now emerges as much from the possession of specialised skills and knowledge as from ownership of capital'. This idea of a 'knowledge elite' or the 'information rich' has a long history, beginning with Saint Simon's early-nineteenth-century prediction that the coming scientific age would herald the rise of a class of technicians. In the early twentieth century, Veblen (1963; first published in 1921) also predicted the rise of a technocratic class ('a soviet of technicians'), an argument also advanced in the early 1970s by Bell (1973), who saw this social stratum of 'engineers of intellectual technology' as an emerging elite (see also Reinecke 1987:87–8). Furthermore, the idea of a technocratic elite controlling centralised information has been a source of inspiration for science-fiction authors warning of the dehumanising potential of a technocratic future, from Capek's *RUR*, Zamyatin's *We*, Orwell's *1984*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Asimov's *I Robot* and Vonnegut's *Player Piano* to Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

In Australia, one of the most influential interpretations of **the information age** was Barry Jones's *Sleepers, Wake! Technology and the Future of Work*, first published in 1982. Jones observed that there was a revolutionary shift in the scale of technological change, and he predicted, like Tanner and Latham, that this would demand fundamental changes to social relations and political priorities (see also Dixon 1986; Jones, B. 1986). Jones placed these transformations in historical perspective, viewing them as a fourth 'age' of human civilisation, following on from pre-industrial society, industrial society (the object of most classical sociology) and post-industrial society (characterised by advanced welfare-capitalist nations).

Jones focused on the 'coming of post-service society', where labour-saving devices would render routine paid and domestic work redundant. He predicted that this transition to a post-service era would highlight new social problems, such as growing unemployment and a search for new identities to compensate for the work-based identities that dominated the previous two eras. The key challenges for policy-makers were thus: the provision of meaningful work or its replacement; tackling forms of inequality based not on access and ownership of the means of production, but on access to and control over information and knowledge; and the democratisation of technology. Jones (1984:173) was concerned that a technologically sophisticated, information-rich elite would become the new mandarins of the post-service economy, while those who were denied access to information would become the new 'intellectual proletariat'.

To avoid this scenario, Jones (1984: ch. 11) argued that governments must act to ensure that the transition from a post-industrial to a post-service society avoids new dimensions of knowledge-based inequality. To achieve this, he advocated a range of education-related policies, including improving educational opportunities for children of low-income families (those most in danger of information poverty), improving public access to technical information through 'open' institutions such as open universities, upgraded public libraries, and other measures devoted to the creation of a 'clever country'. Thus, in Jones's vision of the information age, the state would still perform the role of 'social adjuster'.

However, this prediction of an industrial society based on the inequality of capital leading to an information society based on the inequality of information wealth has not gone unchallenged. One criticism that can be levelled against this form of analysis is that most of the evidence of the profundity of the information revolution is drawn from the advanced capitalist world. The analysis remains embedded within a framework that privileges the nation-state over global trends. The analysis under-emphasises the fact that even though there have been major technological changes in the Australian economy that have resulted in a decline in manufacturing jobs, industrial and primary production still remain central to global economic dynamism. Much of the working class that used to live in the inner cities and suburbs of Australia is now found in areas of Manila, Seoul, Jakarta and Shanghai.

Furthermore, information inequality is not exclusively a feature of the information age. While the past decade witnessed an astonishing consumption of information-technology-related products throughout the advanced capitalist world, these trends cannot be extrapolated globally. One out of every two Australian households now possesses a computer terminal, and the Internet and mobile phones have become commonplace. However, it is salient to note that more than 80 per cent of the world's population have never heard a dial tone

(BBC 1999). Almost 90 per cent of the world's Internet users live in the advanced capitalist First World, which constitutes 15 per cent of the world's population. There are more telephone lines in Manhattan than the whole of Africa. Furthermore, if the Internet were accessible to everyone in Africa, its utility would be severely restricted by other factors, such as basic literacy. Even if literacy levels rose, four-fifths of all Internet sites are in English, a language spoken by only 10 per cent of the world's population.

Another important issue surrounding information inequality – one introduced in chapter 2 – involves the degree of independent social and economic power that this technocratic elite possesses. As Reich observes, these information-rich 'symbolic analysts' are in high demand due to their functional role in lubricating the wheels of global production and finance. However, this might imply that their power base is dependent upon satisfying the needs of capital or government instrumentalities, rather than exercising some independent power base. As Jones, Tanner and Latham point out, information technology has dramatically improved business transactions and decision-making. However, it does not follow that these symbolic analysts control organisational decision-making. They might merely be the new 'pampered palace slaves' of global capitalism.

These issues have been raised in previous sociological debates surrounding the emergence of a new class, such as Bell's 'technocratic class' and Burnham's 'managerial class' (see Wrong 1999: ch. 8). The role of this social stratum and the argument that it has emerged as a separate new elite class with its specific interests and values will be explored in the following sections of this chapter. However, before examining this role, it is necessary to assess the relationship between education and forms of political participation. The next section assesses the claim that ever since the 1960s people with higher levels of education have become more disillusioned with the parliamentary political process and have sought alternative outlets for their value orientation.

New social movements and new politics

Throughout the twentieth century, most Australians equated political equality with enfranchisement: 'democracy was about equality, and equality involved the ability of ordinary people to vote and to stand for parliament' (Thompson, E. 2001:85–6). The extension of the franchise at the turn of the century, however, was not accompanied by a corresponding widening of electoral choices. Most contemporary parliamentary political parties in advanced capitalist societies were formed before or around the turn of the twentieth century (Papadakis 1991). In Australia, the key political divisions had emerged by the end of the first decade of Federation through the unification of the non-labour

free-traders and protectionists against the perceived threat of organised labour in the form of the Australian Labor Party.

The Australian experience seems to add weight to Lipset's (1963:2) claim that 'disintegrative forms of political cleavage are least likely to be found' where workers are able to 'form strong unions and obtain representation in politics' and where universal suffrage has been achieved. These factors helped 'freeze' the major-party alternatives after the first couple of decades of the twentieth century. In other words, once universal adult suffrage was achieved and workers operated within the confines of state regulation, no new social category could emerge to alter radically the existing alternatives. Changes to existing political options, or the 'thawing' of existing alternatives, had to come through mobilising major sections of the population or new reservoirs of potential supporters that crosscut the class, religious and regional certainties of modern industrial political life.

However, over the past few decades, numerous commentators have argued that these political certainties have been undermined. For example, in a detailed account of the transformation of Australian voting behaviour, Kemp (1978:365–6) argued that class was becoming increasingly irrelevant as a determinant of political outlook. Factors that commentators identified to explain the restructuring of class voting during the long economic boom between the end of World War II and the 1980s included: higher levels of affluence enjoyed by most sectors of the population; an increase in social mobility, leading to a tendency for working-class people to adopt middle-class values and aspire to middle-class lifestyles – or 'embourgeoisement' (Rowley 1977:284–9); the gradual decline in the manufacturing sector and blue-collar jobs (Jamrozik 1991:113); the decline in the importance of agriculture and the exodus from the country to the city (Blainey 2001: ch. 3); the growth of the public sector, public employment, the increase in white-collar employment due to the growth of the service industry, technological change and the welfare state (Encel 1990:69–77); the growth in the provision of and the demand for higher education; and the corresponding emergence of a new middle class of professionals and bureaucrats (Davies and Encel 1965:18–42).

Other political sociologists have used these transformations not only to explain the shifting patterns of political behaviour since World War II, but also to predict the demise of 'old' parliamentary politics and the rise of new forms of political expression and new political or social movements (Touraine 1985; Pakulski 1991; Jennett and Stewart 1989). Drawing on data from numerous European countries, Inglehart (1971) also predicted a new fundamental cleavage in liberal-democratic society, based on the attachment to 'material' or 'post-material' values. Respondents to attitudinal studies were asked to indicate the most important issues facing their country: (1) the maintenance of

order in the nation; (2) giving people more say in government decisions; (3) fighting rising prices; and (4) protecting freedom of speech. The first and third options were associated with, or indicators of materialist values, while the second and fourth were associated with non-materialist values. Inglehart predicted that post-materialists would eventually outnumber materialists. Drawing on intergenerational differences, he observed that people who grew up in the 1930s Depression held a more materialist orientation than the 'baby boomer' generation that grew up in the period of postwar reconstruction and the so-called 'age of affluence' in the 1950s and 1960s.

According to Inglehart, the old materialist politics was primarily about the fulfilment of material needs and the conflict between clearly identifiable social categories over the resources to fulfil these needs. New forms of post-materialist political values become feasible once many of these basic material needs have been satisfied, once the old conflicts over resources to fulfil these needs are blunted or transformed into different types of conflict. Habermas (1981:33) also related this shift in value orientation to the emergence of the **new social movements**:

In the last ten to twenty years, conflicts have developed in advanced Western societies that, in many respects, deviate from the welfare-state pattern of institutionalised conflict over distribution. These new conflicts no longer arise in areas of material reproduction; they are no longer channelled through parties and organizations; and they can no longer be alleviated by compensations that conform to the system. Rather new conflicts arise in areas of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. They are manifested in sub-institutional, extra-parliamentary forms of protest ... Studies ... verify the thematic change from 'old politics' which revolve around questions of economic, social, domestic and military security, to 'new politics'. This entails problems of quality of life, equality, individual self-realisation, participation and human rights.

Inglehart identified the young, the well-educated and the affluent as the constituencies for the new social movements that support post-materialist values and 'new politics', including the student movement, civil-rights movements, women's movement, peace movement, environment movement and gay-rights movement. Giddens (1997:511) defines these new social movements as 'a collective attempt to further a common interest or secure a common goal, through collective action outside the sphere of established institutions'. In this sense, social movements can be distinguished from the institutionalised parliamentary form of party politics that dominated industrial capitalist countries throughout the twentieth century.

Papadakis (1991; see also Papadakis and Moore 1994) has provided qualified support for the claim that a post-materialist scenario has been unfolding within Australia. Paying particular attention to environmental politics, he notes

that the programs of the 'old' political parties (Liberal and Labor) are being transformed to link new post-materialist politics with old ideologies to create a synthesis between the old and the new, or the materialist and the post-materialist. According to Papadakis, the 'old' parties in Australia have been relatively more successful than their counterparts overseas in accommodating the challenge to their dominance from these new social movements and post-materialist values. However, the price they have paid for this accommodation has been the transformation of their party programs, their ideologies and their social bases. This accommodation has been important for their own electoral survival, as recent electoral trends have provided support for Inglehart's prediction. For example, analysing the 1996 Federal election, Tanner (1999:192–3) noted how

for the first time the number of voters predominantly interested in broader quality of life issues (post-materialists) exceeded the number of voters interested primarily in material economic issues directly affecting them.

However, there is another perspective on Papadakis's observation that the main political parties have moved to accommodate post-materialist values. This involves the claim that these parties have been 'hijacked' by the values and aspirations of the 'new middle class elites' and better-educated 'information literate' sections of society, resulting in the alienation of 'mainstream' Australia from the political process. It has been claimed that the ALP has been particularly susceptible to this ideological takeover. As the final section of this chapter shows, these claims have led to a political backlash that perceives the struggles for equality outlined in chapter 9 and the struggles of new social movements as attempts by this 'new elite' to undo the Australian settlement and Australian egalitarianism in favour of a system that furnishes different rights to different social groups. This final section of the chapter will argue that these recent debates are fundamentally about two historically different conceptions of inequality.

New elites and inequality

While most of the commentators on new social movements discussed in the previous section view these social forces sympathetically – applying political pressure for expanding citizenship and equality – there are other commentators who claim that collectively these diverse political movements reflect the concerns of an 'intellectual elite', or a 'new class' that increasingly has come to dominate the sphere of western politics and ideas. These commentators have presented a radically different interpretation of the relationship between globalisation, access to information, inequality and power.

According to Betts (1999), democracy, political equality and the effectiveness of majority rule have been undermined in Australia over the past quarter of a century by the acquiescence of governments and oppositions to the views of an intelligentsia that does not represent the aspirations of most Australians. She argues that this 'new class' has attempted to consolidate its elevated status within society through denigrating national-based conceptions of identity held by the majority of citizens, and by imposing their own internationalist, cosmopolitan views of the world. This new inequality reflects a struggle between elite cosmopolitans and parochial battlers. In the context of this book, the 'parochials' remain attached to the forms of nation-building that characterised Australia's first three-quarters of the twentieth century, while the cosmopolitan elite are devoted to internationalising the Australian economy.

Betts's work draws on earlier studies from the UK, including the work of Bernice Martin (1981), and US authors such as Ladd (1969) and Gouldner (1979). The idea of a globally oriented cosmopolitan intelligentsia was also flagged more recently in Christopher Lasch's posthumous *The Revolt of the Elites* (1995). Betts begins by noting that a growing proportion of people within western societies earn their living through non-manual employment, especially credentialised intellectual skills. These people are more likely than most sectors of society to find themselves employed in positions of power, especially within public services and positions where they can express their opinions, such as the media, universities, schools and the church. Their social role, in other words, involves 'creating and defining culture, and the interpretation and transmission of existing beliefs and values' (Betts 1999:71).

Drawing on Gouldner, Betts (1999:75–7) argues that the distinctive characteristic of this class rests principally on 'the wider society's dependence on their skills'. This growing social divide is then linked to the transformations in Australian society over the past two decades. Beginning in the mid-1980s,

the process of globalisation presented economic opportunities to many graduates which their less-well-educated compatriots did not share. These opportunities vary according to the types of skill ... but most graduates are better placed to profit from globalisation, or at least to cope with it, than people who are unskilled. [Betts 1999:81; see also 1993:225]

While this group – which resembles Reich's 'symbolic analysts' – tends to share similar backgrounds, a similar outlook on the world and monopolise valuable cultural capital, they also share a form of language or 'speech community' that acts as a means of social closure to outsiders, or a 'boundary marker'. This language distinguishing cosmopolitans from parochials is based on what Gouldner called the 'culture of careful and critical discourse'. According to Betts (1999:77), when the new elite

make friends, sit on selection committees, join social movements, and when they evaluate the opinions and ideas of others, the unspoken question 'Is this person one of us?' can be answered by that person's use of language.

One component of these language games is the adherence to what Betts, following Parkin, calls 'expressive politics' that proclaim ideals of full equality, improved social welfare, tolerance, opposition to racism and an end to global poverty. Expressive politics finds its

rewards not so much in practical means to reach specified ends, but in the satisfaction gained from a strict adherence to moral principles in the conflict encountered during the pursuit of these goals. [Betts 1999:86]

In Australia, opposition to racism and support for high levels of immigration are the core symbols used to differentiate the new class (Betts 1993:225, 228). Indeed, Betts argues that this university-educated elite holds different values on a range of other social issues, ranging from religious faith to permissiveness, from defence to multiculturalism, from the environment to immigration, and from foreign aid to 'quality of life' or post-materialist objectives. From this reading, which provides an alternative explanation of the post-materialist thesis, the new class are not only opposed to commercial and bourgeois civilisation, but also to the majority of the working class, those 'subordinate groups enjoying some of the fruits of capitalist affluence' (Betts 1999:88). Furthermore, this value divide has been enhanced by divergent outlooks on globalisation. Drawing on Ladd, Betts (1999:91: see also Birrell and Betts 2001:4) argues that cosmopolitanism

is an outcome of education and the desire to take an interest in national and international affairs. Parochialism, by contrast, crystallises as a distinct set of attitudes only in opposition to cosmopolitanism. It is essentially reactive.

Betts claims that the information-rich and social movements representing 'special interest groups' have come to exercise an unhealthy influence on politics and democratic decision-making. This 'great divide' within contemporary Australian society is illustrated in table 10.1 (Betts 1999:93).

Since the 1960s, as a combined result of their growing numerical strength, their material interests, shared value system, and their need for social closure and status recognition, these elites have taken Australian society further away from the politics of nation-building with its fixed national identity, a move that has aroused the suspicion of the 'parochial' majority that has borne the costs of the process of globalisation. While, Betts (1999:190) observes, there has always been a distance between intellectuals and non-intellectuals in Australia, this antipathy began to grow markedly during the 1960s and 1970s:

Table 10.1 Political divisions on economic and cultural questions

	Left	Right
Liberal/Cosmopolitan	For example, people with degrees, employed in the public sector.	For example, salaried managers, and executives with degrees, in the private sector, and professionals in private practice.
Conservative/Parochial	For example, employees without higher education, in either the private or the public sector.	For example, owner–manager of small family business, without higher education.

The new class wanted to define their own cultural style in order to demonstrate their achievement and their difference from the people in the less elevated social strata into which most of them had been born. They found the elements of this new style in the world overseas, first in Europe and then in Asia. A number of specific elements intensified their commitment to it: opposition to the White Australia Policy; opposition to the Vietnam War; internationalism; concern for the plight of Southern European migrants, and pleasure in aspects of migrant culture which seemed to bring ‘overseas’ to the street corner. The first three darkened the image of the parochials and convinced new class cosmopolitans of their racism while the last, cultural diversity, provided a new way of pointing out the deficiencies of the old Australia ... And while many changes were made against the old ways that were being left behind, the accusations of materialism and racism brought the conflict between the old and the new into sharpest relief.

Betts’s presentation of the new dominant class of intellectuals has more ‘parochial’ antecedents closer to home than the international literature of Gouldner, Ladd and Martin upon which she explicitly draws. For instance, within the ALP, there has been a persistent current of thought since the 1960s that has claimed that the party of the working class has been ‘hijacked’ by middle-class intellectuals who have imposed their own values on policy (Thompson, M. 1999; Scott 1991; Jaensch 1989; for a discussion, see Beilharz 1994:189–92). Betts (1999:83) notes how the disgruntled and deposed Calwell criticised the direction the party had taken by the late 1960s under the leadership of an ‘ever-increasing band of pseudo-intellectuals’ (see also Encel 1971:39). As Macintyre (2001:169) notes, Calwell and Whitlam ‘stood for different social constituencies’, the former previously being a clerk and a staunch nationalist, while the latter was university educated and ‘cosmopolitan in outlook’. (See ‘Australian literary antecedents of the new class’, page 244.)

Australian literary antecedents of the new class

During the 1970s and 1980s, discussion of the 'new class' also found resonance in the world of arts (which might appear surprising considering that Martin focused on artists as part of the intellectual elite). The poet Les Murray also employed the term 'new class' after the constitutional crisis of 1975 to distinguish between the old Australia and the urban, university-educated elites, or what he termed 'the vernacular republic' versus the cultural 'ascendancy'. Murray (1997) claimed that this 'Ascendancy' camouflaged its new-class identity by squabbling among itself, a point also made by Betts when she claimed that apparent divisions within the intellectual elite on support for immigration on the grounds of economic growth and multicultural diversity crowd out the majority position that has consistently been opposed to higher levels of immigration on any grounds.

In 1981, the playwright Alex Buzo (1981:1) observed the rise of this new class and produced a satirical 'manual' to decipher the way in which it had 'changed the face of language'. His political and social analysis bore similar hallmarks to that of Betts:

Many New Class people organise themselves into pressure groups to uphold or bypass 'the democratic process' ... Many New Class people are products of the postwar baby boom and have been overeducated to a level of discontent. Many have risen to prominence in government, business and education over the last ten years. They have taken over most of the jobs and set up most of the committees to inquire into everything. Their language has come to dominate the media and their ideology has thoroughly confused the Old Class ... Part of the problem in bridging this chasm between the classes lies in intolerance. The New Class devotes a large amount of time each day to reviling the Old Class and all its standards ... The quality they despise most about these detestable apologies for human beings is their bigotry. [Buzo 1981:2-3, 38]

This idea of a new class rose to even greater prominence once the Fraser Coalition government fell in early 1983. As the Hawke and Keating Labor governments introduced equal employment opportunity legislation, racial vilification legislation and native title legislation, increased immigration levels and sought to coopt various social movements, such as environmental and ethnic groups, a diverse chorus of criticism began to be expressed against the influence that 'minority groups' and their elite 'advocates' wielded in political circles. A year after the Hawke 'ascendancy', Peter Coleman, editor of the literary and political magazine *Quadrant*, claimed that

the dominant ideas in Australia have become those of the New Class regulators who despise the liberal traditions of the country. There are few more urgent tasks than those of mounting an ideological offensive in support of those traditions and against the cultural and intellectual hegemony of the New Class. [quoted in Markus 2001:56]

Transferring a concept introduced by right-wing commentators in the US to the Australian political scene, various commentators, including Coleman and the

Liberal Opposition, complained of the ‘politically correct’ environment that the Keating Labor government and the new class – ‘in church and state, bureaucracy and media, in academia and the arts’ – had allegedly imposed upon Australian political and cultural discourse (Coleman 1996:6; for a discussion of these ‘culture wars’, see Melleuish 1998; Wark 1997:154–78). Parker, in *The Courtesans* (1991:94–5, 114), argued that the Canberra press gallery shared the Hawke government’s ‘corporatist, elitist’ methods of governance and consciously or subconsciously filtered out alternative political views. In a manner that echoed Calwell and Murray, the disendorsed Labor member for Kalgoorlie, Graeme Campbell (Campbell and Uhlmann 1995:vii–viii), linked the rise of this new elite and its ‘authoritarian ideology’ to the ‘betrayal’ of old Australian values:

Australian leadership elites in politics, the bureaucracy, academia, big business, the churches and the media have effectively cut themselves adrift from the interests of the majority of Australians ... As part of this process the elites, while they may mouth concern for the country, have given up thinking in terms of the national interest to pursue an internationalist agenda. This agenda is eroding the foundations of our nation and marginalising the majority, which has less and less say in its own destiny ... They are the new cosmopolitan Ascendancy, holding the ‘old’ Australian majority, from which most of them come, in contempt compared to ‘ethnics’ and Aboriginals, who are viewed through rose coloured glasses.

Campbell argued that ever since the 1960s the ALP bureaucracy and an articulate influential section of the base of the ALP represented this new class divorced from the concerns of the old working-class struggle, or the ‘materialist’ values identified by Inglehart. Campbell identified this ‘old’ working-class struggle with nationalism, white nation-building, assimilationism, protectionism, state interventionism and arbitration. This new-class takeover began under Whitlam and reached its maturity in the 1980s, by which time new-class values (feminist, internationalist and antidiscriminatory) were out of synchrony with the working-class support-base of the party:

The gap between the economic aspirations of the old Australian working class and the social agenda of the new class grew steadily. Multiculturalism and feminism became twin gods and bureaucracies sprang up, staffed by the new class, to ensure that these values permeated society, by force of law if necessary. In common with other affluent countries an increasing social regulation took place, with an accompanying restriction of free speech. The old Australian population was denigrated and as Professor Geoffrey Blainey expressed it, the cult of the migrant grew. The ‘socialist’ ALP became increasingly out of touch with its major support base ... [Campbell 1992:29]

Campbell feared that if the ALP accommodated itself to this new politics and the new class, it would lose its appeal among its traditional working-class

constituency. On the other hand, as earlier sections pointed out, the processes of technological change and globalisation were eroding this traditional basis of that constituency.

Ironically, Betts does not directly refer to these ‘parochial’ predecessors and instead opts to base her argument on international academics. On the other hand, this might simply reinforce her claim that Australian intellectual elites are cosmopolitan in outlook. Latham (quoted in Cope and Kalantzis 2000:72) also accepts that there is a growing divide between global-oriented cosmopolitan elites and those who have experienced hardship as globalisation has unfolded. However, he rejects the view that Australia can retreat behind the institutional pillars of the ‘Australian settlement’:

You know Christopher Lasch’s book, *The Revolt of the Elites*? ... The argument seems to be one of internalising the emotions of those who’ve been left behind by the change process, globalisation, the information age, the shifts in social values ... Meanwhile the elites are doing all these sorts of things at an abstract, government level, at an academic level, at the media level, globally rather than connected to local communities. So the elites seem to be immoral, essentially. Self-interested and doing their own thing at the expense of the rest of society, at the expense of community ... Conservative politicians like Howard and Hanson have cleverly been able to exploit this feeling. They are telling people that these changes are being shoved down your throat. Whether it’s been happening in practice doesn’t matter too much.

To appreciate the political stakes involved in these debates over globalisation, multiculturalism, equal rights, inequality and the new class, it is useful to examine the impact of a number of social movements upon the ‘traditional’ field of parliamentary politics and upon political debates over inequality. These examples reveal that the struggles of equality are far more complex than notions of new intellectual-elite cultural hijack suggest.

The battle over the meaning of equality

As noted above, according to Betts (1999:191), from the 1970s onwards, one of the principal means through which the new class distinguished itself from ‘lower class Australians’ was through its support for immigration and multiculturalism. However, while most observers accept that there was a high degree of political bipartisanship for multiculturalism among the major political parties up until 1996, the concept meant different things to different intellectuals. Furthermore, from the 1980s onwards, there was a growing sense of dissatisfaction with multiculturalism among many that Betts labels the ‘new class’.

Ever since the advent of multicultural policy in the 1970s, there has been a 'careful and critical discourse' that has challenged official manifestations of multiculturalism. As we pointed out in chapter 6, Marxists have argued that the promotion of ethnic differences is an ideological device that obscures more important bases of social solidarity such as class. Other critics have claimed that multicultural policy has retained the essence of assimilationism whereby white Australians feel able to tolerate and welcome 'others', while continuing to stay in control of the nation-building agenda (Hage 1998:102–3).

As noted earlier, the idea that a new intellectual class had revised Australia's historical record and questioned the traditions behind the Australian identity began to take hold among certain elements of Labor and non-Labor politics during the 1980s. As noted in chapter 6, in 1984, Blainey sparked a debate over the 'Asianisation of Australia', warning that a continuation of existing immigration policy and multiculturalism could lead to social tension and ethnic tribalism. Furthermore, hinting at a growing social divide, he claimed that governments and supporters of multiculturalism had taken Australia further along the multicultural road than most Australians desired (Blainey 1984:12). Echoing the new-class theory, he argued that an 'alliance of academics and ethnics had become increasingly influential as advisors to the immigration department in Canberra'. This policy had been 'imposed from above' and 'slightly puzzled or offended large groups of Australians of British and Irish descent' (Blainey 1984:16).

While Blainey also adopted the language of a new class, he suggested that multiculturalist policy had been inspired by guilt, unlike Betts's argument that social closure inspired new-class values. Hugh Morgan (quoted in Markus 2001:70) adopted a stance close to Blainey, arguing in 1988 that the 'guilt industry', led by 'church leaders, academics, journalists and Government ministers, had embarked on a campaign to 'delegitimise' the history of white settlement.

Markus (2001: ch. 3) has argued that Blainey and Morgan performed a pioneering role in reshaping race politics in Australia, reinforcing the value of Australia's white history. This backlash was associated with a broader campaign during the 1980s to 'liberalise' the Australian economy. However:

key elements within the New Right were of the view that their ends could not be achieved by focusing exclusively on economic issues. For reforms to be fundamental and long-lasting, safe from the whims of electoral fortune, a change in social values and political culture was required. The values which underpinned the welfare state needed to be challenged and defeated. One way of achieving these ends, some believed, was through direct attack on the recipients of affirmative action, on the intellectuals who provided the rationale for policies, and on those bureaucrats whose jobs depended on the administration of government programs. In New Right terminology these intellectuals and bureaucrats consti-

tuted the 'New Class'. It is in this context that the attacks on what was presented as a romanticisation of Aboriginal culture, on revisionist historians, and on the so-called welfare 'industries', become comprehensible. [Markus 2001:53]

Thus, it can be argued that the concept of a new class formed part of a concerted campaign to challenge many of the historical gains in the struggle for equality that were described in chapter 9. While the labour movement, the women's movement, migrants and Aborigines had struggled to achieve equal participation in the process of nation-building and sought to redefine national identity, the new right responded with

criticism of supposed policies of racial discrimination, identification and criticism of interest groups and exposure of their techniques by which they sought to gain their ends and warning of the consequences for the nation if sectional interests were allowed to prevail. [Markus 2001:68]

This backlash also contested the meaning of equality used by these new social movements. In order to attack the welfare state and equal-opportunity legislation, this counteroffensive returned to a more 'formal' understanding of the meaning of equality. The social movements described in chapter 9 had struggled for **substantive equality** by recognising that equal access to a 'particular good can only be secured by different treatment – by providing something extra to those disadvantaged or ... by means of affirmative action' (Hunter 1999:120). On the other hand, the counteroffensive promoted a 'formal' form of equality whereby 'everyone should be treated the same, regardless of race or history' (Hunter 1999:122). Drawing on the evidence presented in chapters 8 and 9, it can be argued that this ideological counteroffensive embraced a conception of equality that had been applied to justify the White Australia Policy and assimilationism.

Markus traces the use of the rhetoric of **formal equality** by this 'new right' to the Western Australian Chamber of Mines' 1983 campaign against Aboriginal land rights, which used the slogan 'Land rights should be equal rights'. He also notes how it was applied to the Mabo High Court decision of June 1992, where various commentators 'rehearsed the argument that the normal and appropriate course for governments was to maintain the equal treatment of all citizens' (Markus 2001:59, 75, 96–7). He also notes how John Howard – in his campaign to remove the Labor Party from office in 1996 – seized upon the idea that new-class elites had undermined the balance of 'fairness' and egalitarianism and threatened 'the national interest'. The future prime minister bemoaned that the 'bureaucracy of the new class' was oblivious to the needs of 'mainstream Australians': 'There is a frustrated mainstream in Australia today which sees government decisions increasingly driven by the noisy, self-interested clamour of powerful vested interests ...' Howard vowed to end the regime of political correctness that he claimed had

stifled the political atmosphere under the Labor government. In this view, political correctness was a means used by the new class to silence the majority (see also Coleman 2000).

Howard's appeal to the 'battler' against the elite was also employed by Pauline Hanson. This is the context for Paul Kelly's observations on the 'financial foundations of the 1990s political culture' and 'the politics of resentment' that we discussed in chapter 5. In her maiden speech in the House of Representatives, Hanson drew on the same divisions as Howard and applied the same formalist conception of equality to attack substantive equality:

We now have a situation where a type of reverse racism is applied to mainstream Australians by those who promote political correctness and those who control the various tax-payer funded 'industries' that flourish in our society servicing Aboriginals, multiculturalists and a host of other minority groups. In response to my call for equality for all Australians, the most noisy criticism came from the fat cats, bureaucrats and do-gooders. [quoted in Markus 2001:156]

As Markus (2001:191) notes, Hanson was able to deflect claims that she was overtly racist by employing this formalist understanding of equality, which appeared

to be affirming the principle of racial equality, consistently calling for all Australians to be treated equally, for government assistance to be provided on the basis of need, not race.

While this counteroffensive often acknowledged that there were some blemishes in white Australian history, it argued that the struggles outlined in chapter 9 had 'gone too far' and that elites claiming to represent these social groups had accumulated too much power. It was in this political context that many of the recent political and cultural controversies listed at the beginning of chapter 8 must be understood. Thus Blainey (2001:56) noted that for too long Aboriginal achievements had been ignored by historians, and that a correction had been necessary. However, 'today the correction has gone too far'. (See 'Culture wars, equality and different voices', page 250.)

By the late 1990s, the impact of this transformation in the meaning of equality could be witnessed across government policy. For instance, Gunn (1999:145) notes that the Coalition government, arguing that it wanted to provide women with greater freedom of choice between staying at home and paid employment, sought to correct what they saw as an 'imbalance in government support and recognition for one family type over another'. In 1998 the Coalition announced that

Labor neglected women and mothers who chose not to be part of the paid work force ... Unlike Labor, the Coalition's policies are not about promoting particular roles as a stereotype for all women. [quoted in Gunn 1999:145]

Culture wars, equality and different voices

Throughout the 1990s there was a spate of literary controversies that were tendered as evidence that formerly marginalised groups were now bending the equality stick too far.

The controversy sparked by Helen Garner's account of the Ormond College case centred on allegations that feminism had 'gone too far' (Garner 1995; Meade 1996; Goldsmith 1996:5). Faust criticised the victim-focused 'wimporrhoea' in modern feminism and Williamson, in *Dead White Males*, attacked multiculturalism and questioned the existence of 'the Patriarchy' in his parody of 'neo-marxist, non-essentialist feminist, post-structuralist literary theory'.

Trioli (1996:67) saw parallels between the Garner controversy and the Demidenko affair, where some critics interpreted the fact that an allegedly anti-Semitic book written by an unknown 'exotic migrant' had taken Australia's most prestigious literary award as an example of how multiculturalism 'is taking over the country'. In another celebrated case, when Leon Carmen, a middle-aged white male, published a novel under the identity of an Aboriginal woman from the stolen generations, his literary agent defended the hoax to the *Daily Telegraph* (14 March 1997:5) on the grounds that it 'had been a way of circumventing an anti-White male bias in Australian publishing'. As Rundle observed (1997:46):

The establishment of prizes and awards for writers from specific social groups and the clamour to hear voices and stories from the marginalised and oppressed has created a situation in which the potential for mischief is great indeed. Conservative commentators have used this as a stick with which to beat such 'affirmative action' awards, and to extend the attack and posit the existence of a kind of reverse racism. In this scenario mainstream anglo-celtic existence has been constructed as uniquely uninteresting, and undeserving of artistic attention by multicultural cliques, who have obliged creative people from that group to take on other identities in order to be taken seriously.

Most of these debates over feminism, equal rights, multiculturalism and affirmative action had been played out in the United States 'culture wars' over the preceding years through Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Robert Hughes's *Culture of Complaint* (1994), and other

conservative and liberal intellectuals ... who attempted to stem the tide flowing out of feminism, separatist multiculturalism and the remainder of complex 'isms' which had welled up in the wake of the political and intellectual unrest of the late 1960s. [Riemer 2001:104–5]

Regardless, of whether or not this was Labor's policy, the consequences of correcting the imbalance was to question the value of affirmative-action legislation, downsize the Office of the Status of Women and cut child-care expenditure, central components of the ongoing struggle for gender equality discussed in chapter 9.

The environmental movement, the struggle for Aboriginal rights and multiculturalism were given special attention in this new-right counteroffensive. This treatment went beyond the perception that the environment movement

threatened the material interests of mining capital, or that Aboriginal land rights created uncertainty for pastoralists, or that the new-class multiculturalists were eroding Australia's national sovereignty and sense of unity. Despite mounting concern over global governance, critics had to accept (as we pointed out in chapter 6) that the Mabo and Wik High Court decisions were majority interpretations of British common law. The intensity of the campaigns against these movements and policies was also due to the way they challenged the foundations of the white Australian identity and the moral basis for white nation-building. As pointed out in chapter 8, since 1788 white Australians have justified their possession or custodianship of the land upon the manner in which they progressively transformed and developed it. It was possible to justify *terra nullius* on the grounds that the original inhabitants did not possess the land because they did not improve it or make it more productive. This led white Australia to acquire a 'developmental impulse', whereby the settlers' claim was based on their reordering of the environment, an idea that the 'people who cannot develop a country must make way for those who can' (quoted in Lake 1997:87). This developmental impulse was articulated after World War II in Prime Minister Chifley's concern that unless 'we are able to do something with (this country), we will not be able to justify before the world our retention of such a great country' (quoted in Kelly, P. 2001:65).

Blainey (2001:1) has also noted the dominance of this nation-building imperative throughout most of Australia's history:

Even as late as the 1960s, most Australians hoped that their country would become powerful and populous. They believed that a large population could defend their country. It would be testimony to their pioneering qualities and it would show the world that Australians were worthy custodians of a unique and difficult land.

The decline in the goal of national development is, he believes, one of the most significant value shifts over the past thirty years. He listed a number of forces behind the current demise of the 'trustee-like argument'. Most large nation-building projects are now capital intensive and employ relatively little labour, while most modern migrants flock to the large cities. There is also greater popular scepticism over population expansion. Echoing Inglehart's post-materialist thesis, Blainey (2001:27–8) also observed that people are 'more likely to embrace nature when most of its people have reached a comfortable standard of living'. Finally, he claims that 'advocacy groups', such as the green and Aboriginal movements,

have claimed large areas of this space ... It has also depended on the decline of the belief, among Australians generally, that the vast interior holds economic promise. Gone – gone temporarily or permanently – is the old faith in national development. [Blainey 2001:12–16]

This developmental impulse was also noted earlier in the chapter 8 discussion of race and nation, where the dispossessions of Scottish Highlanders and Gippsland Aborigines were interpreted as ‘improvements’ and ‘civilising missions’. By the end of the twentieth century, such an impulse could no longer be upheld on grounds of ‘civilisation’. Furthermore, the environmental movement had questioned the sustainability of endless growth. The debates that have been described in this chapter seem to suggest that if nation-building and the developmental impulse are to retain any relevance in determining local identity and the possession of land then they must be sought on other grounds.

This section has critically assessed a variety of claims that a new divide exists within Australian society between university-educated cosmopolitan-oriented elites and a nationally oriented mainstream majority. The conclusion drawn has suggested that this divide has been overstated. The problem of elite leadership was not unique to the end of the twentieth century. As noted in chapter 9, throughout twentieth-century Australia there has been a consistent concern over the relationship between persons occupying the apex of powerful organisations and those they claim to represent. Furthermore, the elite groups identified by Betts have been denigrated across the world in modern times by powerful leaders, ranging from Mao’s attack on intellectuals to the thinly veiled anti-Semitic attack on cosmopolitans during the period of postwar high Stalinism. Many Australian commentators prior to the ‘cultural revolution’ of the 1960s also noted the anti-intellectual bias of Australian culture (Horne 1966). Finally, there is insufficient evidence to support claims that university-educated elites share a common set of values that allow them to either act in unison or pursue a common set of interests. Betts herself notes that many environmentalists have argued against a high immigration intake on the grounds of ‘careful and critical reasoning’. An intellectual elite has always dominated political debate within Australia, and modern intellectual elites represent a wide range of positions, represent conflicting class, gender and ethnic interests, and view the world through a variety of lenses. As Horne (2001a:93) notes, ‘there are as many elite opinions as there are elites’. Burchill (2002) has even argued that right-wing commentators have adopted this social classification to allow them ‘to courageously challenge the orthodoxies of the “elites” or “chattering classes” – in particular political correctness – without explaining their own immunity from such a contagion’. However, this new language of class performs a more important role in redefining struggles for equality. As Scalmer (1999:12) observes, for conservative commentators,

the figure of the ascendant intellectual is not used to widen the scope of social change and encourage struggles outside the ambit of working-class institutions. Instead, it is used to wind back the meagre victories of the new social movements and to stigmatise the university-educated as a new ruling class.

The long list of national controversies (listed at the beginning of chapter 8) that contributed to Australia's 'culture war' throughout the past decade suggests a livelier exchange of political positions than supporters of the new-class theorists claim.

Conclusion

As the Australian identity wars of the 1990s were heating up, Henderson (quoted in Reynolds, H. 1996:98) warned that history 'should not be used as a weapon in contemporary political debates'. However, Kane (1997:117) suggests that history cannot remain as innocent as Henderson suggests:

identity claims which have long proved their usefulness can become impractical if societal values change or novel challenges arise. In these circumstances, dominant conceptions of national unity may seem to demand revision or renewal. Readings of history may become controversial as people plunder the past for values, characteristics or qualities that might be conscripted into present service. A nation's past may constitute a 'repository of treasures' to be drawn upon as circumstances require, but the value of any particular treasure is always contestable and frequently contested.

The disagreements over equality and identity over the past decade can be interpreted as part of this historical treasure hunt. The political controversies examined in this chapter are merely another example of the contested nature of 'imagined communities'. To return to the discussion of national identity in chapter 8, these imagined communities, or 'virtual republics' (Wark 1997), are necessarily built on political myths, and no single group can legitimately claim ownership over the symbols and meanings of the past.

As this chapter has shown, during the 1990s the struggles for equality engaged in by various social groups were contested by a more conservative vision of national well-being and national identity. This conservatism also employed the language of equality to support its claims. However, this version was more formalistic, arguing that everyone, regardless of circumstances, should be treated equally. As the previous two chapters demonstrated, this formal equality often guarantees that people with different attributes will experience unequal life changes. The struggles for equality discussed in chapter 9 sought ways to overcome the structural barriers that maintained various forms of inequality – state controls in the field of industrial relations, affirmative action in gender relations, greater self-determination in multicultural and indigenous affairs. The impact of globalisation, which was increasingly felt by Australians during the 1980s and 1990s, brought with it the potential that older

bonds of national identity would weaken and other identities could ‘assert themselves much more strongly’ (Capling, Considine and Crozier 1998:12).

However, globalisation also promoted an atmosphere of uncertainty among many who felt marginalised by change. The conservative backlash of the 1990s tried to manipulate these concerns, glorified a mythical past age of ‘certainty’, made claims that those groups struggling for equality had ‘gone too far’ and that the resources allocated to ‘targeted groups’ were out of proportion with their needs. This backlash also proclaimed a more secure and fixed knowledge of the past, pointing to a stable ‘natural’ sense of identity, by reasserting the truth of the foundational political myth that was explored in chapter 8. To its critics, however, this treasure from the historical repository appeared to be little more than a desire to reverse the gains that movements for equality had struggled for throughout most of the twentieth century.

Indeed, it is possible to reinterpret many of the political debates during the 1990s as part of a counteroffensive waged against the social movements such as the labour movement, the women’s movement and the Aboriginal movement, which had struggled throughout the twentieth century to redefine inequality and offer a more ‘substantive’ understanding of equality. The counteroffensive – led by what can only be referred to as academic, business and political ‘elites’ with the support of populist figures – sought to reframe the definition of equality. This more formal definition of equality sought to resurrect a form of egalitarianism that had dominated Australian political culture during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, an egalitarianism based on sameness and threatened by changes that led to diversity and a more complex redefinition of the Australian identity. The vitriol that characterised these debates can be interpreted as a fallout from the ‘appalling difficulty’ that Encel warned of in chapter 8, when he argued that the task of ‘maintaining some kind of national identity’ in a post-racist, postcolonial society had to be faced.

Key terms and concepts

- Structural adjustment
- Globalisation
- The information age
- New social movements
- New elites
- Substantive equality
- Formal equality

Study questions

- 1 Assess the contribution of the Accord experience in the historical context of the politics of equality in Australia.

- 2 What political, technological and economic forces accelerated the process of globalisation and what impact has this process had upon Australia?
- 3 What's new about new social movements?
- 4 Is there a new divide in Australian society between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor'? How does this divide relate to existing relations of inequality?
- 5 In what sense can the university educated be considered a 'new class' or a 'new elite'?
- 6 Examine the debates listed at the beginning of chapter 8 in the light of the politics of identity discussed at the end of this chapter. What visions of Australia's future can be discerned from these controversies?

Further reading

- Betts, K. 1999. *The Great Divide: Immigration Politics in Australia*. Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove.
 Uses a range of historical, statistical and theoretical material to argue that there has been a growing division between university-educated elites and 'mainstream' Australia over the past few decades.
- Blainey, G. 2001. *This Land is All Horizons: Australia's Fears and Visions*. Sydney: ABC Books.
 A conservative take on some of the culture wars of the 1990s, examining issues such as the environment and Aboriginal rights, and concluding with a historical stock-taking of Australian egalitarianism.
- Horne, D. 2001. *Looking for Leadership: Australia in the Howard Years*. Melbourne: Viking.
 A reflective commentary on post-nation-building Australia from the author of *The Lucky Country*. Dismissive of the elite/mainstream dichotomy used by more conservative writers.
- Markus, A. 2001. *Race: John Howard and the Remaking of Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
 A contemporary examination of the way in which the concept of race has been used by conservative politicians and writers. Focuses on Aboriginal and immigration issues.
- Sheil, C. (ed.). 2001. *Globalisation: Australian Impacts*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
 A collection of critical essays, mainly focusing on political-economy issues, that covers the effect of the process of globalisation on a wide range of Australian institutions.
- Stilwell, F. 2000. *Changing Track: A New Political Economic Direction for Australia*. Sydney: Pluto Press.
 An argument for transforming the economic and political structures with a vision for a more equitable and just Australian society within a global framework.

11 Conclusion

Inequality in Australia is the product of our long-held conviction that a new approach to understanding social inequality was necessary. We could see that, in attempting to explain the persistent structures and new forms of social inequality, past approaches could not adequately explain the changing nature of inequality experienced in western industrial societies, such as Australia, over at least the past four decades.

The holistic approach

The holistic approach we have developed links three facets of inequality – the sociological approaches to it (theory), the extent of individuals' experiences of it (self-experience), and the evidence for its existence (empirical reality). Acknowledging their location in a wider historical process, we have applied this model to three broad domains – the body, the self and politics – which correspond to parts 1, 2 and 3. In the broad sweep, the chapters above have attempted to map the nature of inequality on three fronts: the three facets of inequality – that is, theory, self-experience and empirical reality; the three broad domains of the body, the self and politics; and historical development. In a sense, this book represents a mapping exercise where we have filled nine cells in a three-by-three table (see figure 11.1).

The rationale for our holistic approach – that is, our linking theory, self-experience and empirical reality – emerged from our recognition that the problems with earlier and current approaches was often their overlooking of one or more of these facets (see figure 11.2). Chapter 2, for instance, demonstrated that the body does not exist as a biological given independent of social life. In criticising the view 'that we are free to construct our biographies, our bodies and our genders', we pointed out the ways this view overlooks a wide range of empiri-

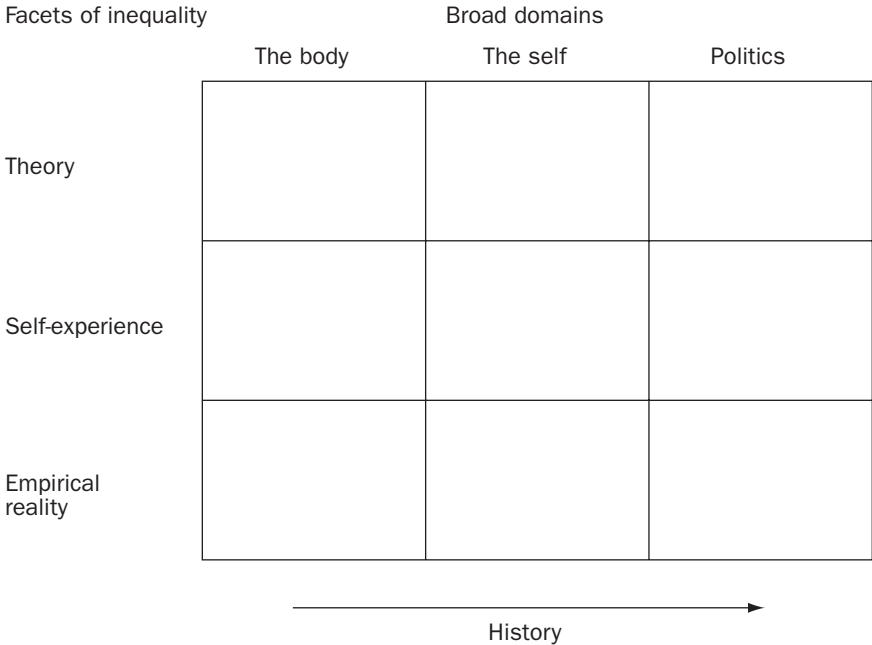


Figure 11.1 The broad picture of *Inequality in Australia*

cal events in our lives that limit our capacity to alter the body and our experience of it. Also, in chapter 5, in our examination of past works on inequality, we identified the problems of not paying enough attention to the three facets of our holistic model. We saw how Davies's analysis of images of class was strong on its inclusion of self-experience but weak in terms of providing the nature of the empirical reality in which individuals were located. Without access to that empirical reality, how would a researcher know whether individuals' images of class and inequality were accurate or simply delusions? By contrast, we saw a strong grounding in empirical reality in Peel's work, along with a sensitivity to individuals' lived experiences, but less integration of the realm of theory. The latter was almost certainly a result of Peel's focus as a historian, which deflected the asking of questions, such as: What is maintaining patterns of inequality? When theory is integrated, it not only guides the development of research questions, but also provides working hunches as to what the answers might be, as well as some clear indication as to what the evidence will look like. Although it was a brief contribution, we saw how Connell's integration of theory, self-experience and empirical reality, especially his stressing the generative approach to class, could shed some light on the question of what helps to maintain inequality, especially when the inequalities in areas that most affect our life chances are often not perceived as important by those most affected.

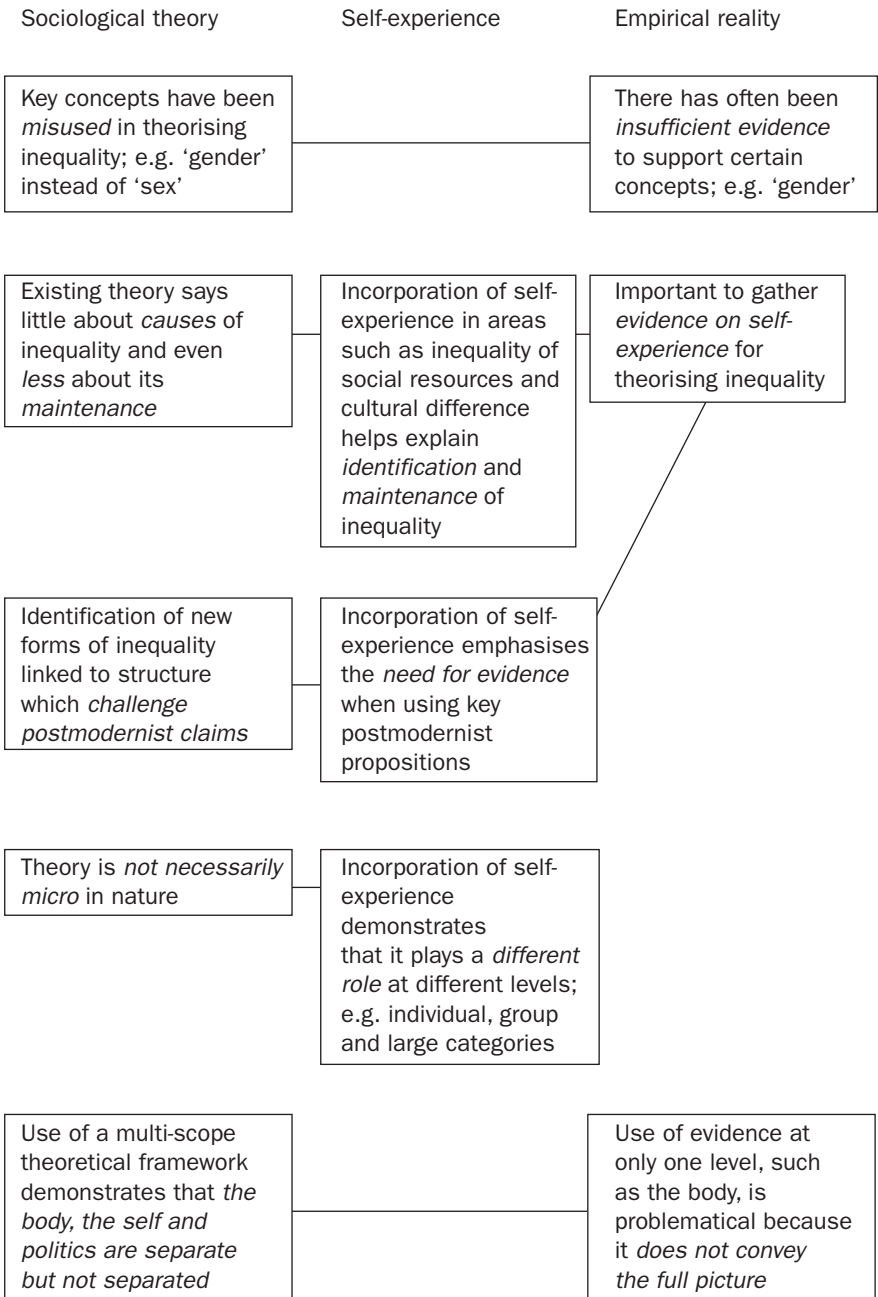


Figure 11.2 Key insights in *Inequality in Australia*

In terms of the integration of theory with the other two facets of the holistic model, we see theory as enhanced and strengthened by its integration. Our discussion in each of the chapters has shown that our model sensitises us to the importance of asking and attempting to answer five key questions when theorising inequality: (1) Does inequality exist in a particular social setting? (2) What is the nature of that inequality? (3) What are the factors producing it? (4) What are the factors maintaining it? And (5) what are the effects of that inequality? The breadth of the material covered in the three parts of this book, we contend, not only prompts the asking of these questions, but also goes a long way to answering them, perhaps with the exception of (3). The origins of inequality in the domains we have covered, along with all other sites of inequality, are to this day resistant to ready explanation.

We should add at this point that in presenting this holistic model we are not ignoring the debt we owe to numerous other scholars of inequality. Smaje (1996), for example, presents his ‘theory of practice’, which, at face value, resembles the triangular image of our holistic model. He links ‘structure’, ‘identity’ and Bourdieu’s idea of ‘habitus’; that is, ‘the set of dispositions which structure people’s social, spatial and temporal orientations to the world’ (Smaje 1996:148). His notion of structure is an approximation of our understanding of empirical reality. Also, his stress on the inclusion of identity corresponds to that facet of our holistic model. But structure and identity for Smaje are not directly linked. Their only connection is via habitus, a linkage that seems to exclude sociological theory. Although scholars such as Smaje and Connell (1977) have alerted us to the importance of inclusion of individuals’ self-understandings in any theory of inequality, our linking of theory, self-experience and empirical reality in this book is an innovation.

The domains of inequality

The main reason for our choice of these domains of inequality is that they are empirical realms whose understanding requires the application of different extremes of scope. We use scope in this sense to indicate the nature of the vantage point of the researcher. In the case of the body, the researcher is close to the object of study in much the same way as a portrait photographer is close to the subject. At the other extreme, the study of politics involves standing back at a distance from the evidence to include entities as broad as classes, nations and historical epochs. Using this photographic metaphor, this level of scope is akin to satellite photography. Somewhere in between, but not necessarily in the middle, is the self, a focus that is probably the equivalent of group photography or individuals in a background setting. As our metaphor indicates, our

approach to the self had its own internal levels of scope, ranging from the individual (chapter 7), through groups and categories (chapter 6) to more inclusive social categories (chapter 5). Notwithstanding what might apply in photography, all levels of scope are required in building sociological theory. This point has not been fully appreciated in earlier research on inequality.

Throughout the book the links at different levels of scope are acknowledged. To be clear, we are not saying that we have built a single, complex theory that explains inequality at all levels of scope. What we are saying is that our treatment of gender, for example, at different levels of scope demonstrates that any snapshot of gender inequality only captures a part of the empirical reality, which in turn supports a part of the explanation. This point is a little like the researcher wanting to explain the impact of a disease such as tuberculosis. At one level of scope, there is the bacteriologist examining cultures under a microscope. Other researchers studying the same phenomenon could be analysing subjects' social contacts to establish the nature of social networks or studying broad population statistics over time to extract patterns of morbidity and mortality. All these vantage points are important and reinforce the point that a single snapshot at one level, at one point in time, is limited in what it can explain. Our analysis of gender demonstrates that, despite any apparent unconnectedness between the study of gender at different levels of scope, there are theoretical links across those levels. For example, the differential socialisation of men and women (see chapter 7) does not occur in isolation, but is related to risk and risk-taking behaviour among men and women in terms of their bodies (see chapter 3), which in turn is related to the gendered nature of labour markets in Australia and on the wider global stage. Similar linkages can be made in the case of the internationalisation of the waterfront dispute in 1998. The Maritime Union of Australia seeking and gaining international support links the broad domain of politics (chapter 10) and the inequality of access to education and its consequences for the changing structure of the workforce (chapter 5). These types of links between levels of scope, albeit difficult to map with precision, are behind Giddens's (1991:32) comment that "self" and "society" are interrelated in a global milieu'.

Another important reason for our choice of these domains of inequality is that they continue to be treated as isolated domains of intellectual inquiry that perpetuate the three myths associated with those domains. Exploding these myths – that is, the myth of the body (that the body consists of material processes independent of social life), the myth of the self (that it is free, autonomous and independent of social constraints), and the myth of politics (that there has been a widening of participation in the political process) – has been crucial, if only because, as myths, they are anathema to any approach that values the integration of empirical reality. In other words, they cannot be supported by empirical evidence and, accordingly, have all helped deflect attention away from the nature of inequality in these three domains.

The nature of the findings

The findings in this book exist on at least three levels. First, there are the more concrete, empirical findings that relate to patterns of inequality in each of the three parts, which we do not intend to rehearse again (see, for example, empirical findings on wealth in chapter 5). Second, there is our identification in each of the domains of the structural constraints that limit and/or shape individuals' lives. Whether it be the 'constrained' body or the body as 'cultural mirror' in a modern social context (see chapter 2), the consequences of pursuing cultural identity (see chapter 6), or the effects on labour markets of globalisation (see chapter 10), these structural constraints are all directly related to structured inequality.

There is a third area of findings that have wider application than the specific areas covered by those mentioned above. We are referring to the wider theoretical significance of the application of our holistic model to the domains of inequality we have chosen. This significance is not unidimensional but, rather, springs from a number of insights. There is, first, our demonstration that inequality is a dynamic concept. It is not disappearing. Instead in some areas, such as wealth, the gap between the most wealthy and the poor in Australia is widening (see chapter 5). Second, new forms of inequality are emerging. The rising importance of marketable educational qualifications has marginalised large numbers of workers who have not only been disadvantaged by their inability to gain those qualifications, but also by their losing a voice in the wider political process (see chapter 10). Third, there are theoretical and empirical links across the three domains that demonstrate the need for analysis of inequality at different levels of scope. In terms of the empirical realm, we saw, for example, that a macro process like globalisation impinges on labour markets in Australia (see chapters 9 and 10). At the theoretical level, we have already identified the importance of the application of key concepts, such as gender, at different levels of scope (see chapters 4, 7 and 9). Finally, there is identification of forms of inequality that are not directly linked to life chances, such as the inequality of transsexuals' ability to realise their desired gender identities because of a number of structural constraints (chapter 7).

As a concluding comment, we offer a theoretical framework for approaching the study of inequality. We do not pretend to have generated a new, causal theory that accounts for the origins, maintenance or effects of inequality. Also, notwithstanding our private political agendas, our aim has not been to present a disguised ideological treatise aimed at promoting change to the structure of inequality. Our task has been primarily to understand it.

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