Society and Gender

An Introduction to Sociology

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*Dedicated to June Fielding, feminist sociologist,
in recognition of her courage, determination and
intellectual honesty.*

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Preface

In 1987 a group of women members of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Queensland decided to develop an alternative introductory sociology course in which issues of gender and of feminism would play a central part. The course has proved immensely popular: it began in 1988 with 80 students and grew in 3 years to an enrolment of well over 300. But it has presented those involved in its teaching with the difficult problem of finding suitable textbooks for a course *not* intended as an introduction to feminist theory, but as an introduction to sociology with a feminist bias *with* a reasonable coverage of traditional sociological topics and approaches. Eventually we became tired of using a hotch-potch of conventional sociology texts and monographs on gender, and set out to do something about it. This text is the result.

Although the organising principle throughout has been gender, we make no apology for discussing women/girls at length, and men/boys much more briefly. There exists a plethora of sociological material about the latter (much of it by default) and we believe that the first step to a truly comprehensive sociology is to be taken by elevating awareness of the part played by the female half of humanity to equal prominence with the usual male-centred analysis. We are also well aware that the book lacks some topics usually included in introductory sociology texts (such as deviance, religion and urban society), but we consider that these omissions are compensated for by the inclusion of other important areas of social life, such as sport and science/technology, usually omitted, and by a brief discussion of the genetics of *sex*, which we hope makes clearer the social and cultural significance of *gender*.

A number of people other than the editors have contributed, in various ways, to the evolution of this book. One of the most important of these is Claire Williams, now of Flinders University, who pioneered women's studies and the feminist approach in this Department from 1976, when she took over the introductory course 'An Inquiry into the Nature of Women'. Claire started a tradition kept alive and developed, largely alone for most of the time, by June Fielding, whose death in early 1992 added a tragic footnote to the preparation of this text. Our colleague Diane Gibson has participated in the planning and teaching of the course from which the book arose, and it is unfortunate that other obligations prevented her taking part in its production. We are particularly grateful, of

course, to our four contributing authors for filling in what would have been important gaps, and for enduring *three* editors with tolerance. The greatest tolerance, however, has been displayed by our long-suffering publisher, Peter Debus, at whose patience and understanding we can only marvel.

Last, but definitely not least, our thanks go to the unsung heroes of our departmental office: Jenny Figueiredo, colleague and typist *extraordinaire*, on whom we have all relied so much for so long, and to Judy Bieg, Jill Pappos and Desiree Watts, all of whom had a hand in the preparation of the manuscript; and to the hundreds of students whose enthusiasm for the course 'Society and Gender' led to the writing of its namesake.

Gillian Lupton, Patricia Short and Rosemary Whip,
The University of Queensland, 1992

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Jonny Hart, p 175; Punch Publications Ltd, p 22.

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