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Source: *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 4, A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN THE ACADEMY: The Difference It Makes (Winter 1981), pp. 446-465

Published by: [Penn State University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41167490>

Accessed: 19-12-2015 22:42 UTC

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# ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF GENDER

JUDITH SHAPIRO

**T**HIS PAPER WAS PREPARED for a lecture series entitled "Studying Women: The Impact on the Social Sciences and Humanities." I might have followed the general theme of the series by calling my own paper "Anthropology and the Study of Women." I felt it important, however, to define my subject as the study of gender rather than the study of women. Let me begin by discussing why I considered this reformulation necessary.

The anthropological studies of sex roles that have appeared in recent years have been primarily studies of women. This is not surprising, since the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s led to a growing interest in the question of gender in various academic fields.<sup>1</sup> There are problems, however, in defining our enterprise as the study of women, and the first I would like to point out is what can be called the problem of *markedness*. I borrow this term from linguists and semioticians, who use it to refer to an asymmetrical relationship between a pair of categories that constitute complementary opposites within some larger class.<sup>2</sup> The terms "man" and "woman," for example, serve to contrast male and female members of the larger class of human beings; as such, they appear to be complementary opposites. At the same time, the term "man," as we know, can be used in a more general sense to contrast the human species as a whole with some other category. Thus, the terms "man" and "woman" designate

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categories that are also in a hierarchical relationship, since one of the terms can be used to refer to the wider class as a whole, in effect subsuming what is its opposite term at a lower level of contrast. In oppositions of this sort, the more general term is referred to as the “unmarked” member of the pair, while the other, more restricted in its meaning, is the “marked” term. Feminists have themselves called attention to the asymmetry of gender categories in language, which operates in pronouns as well. The use of the pronoun “his” in the phrase “everyone should weed his own garden” is appropriate whether the suggestion is being made to an all-male group or a mixed one. The phrase “everyone should weed her own garden,” however, restricts the class of appropriate subjects to female.

The relatively unmarked quality of maleness, reflected in the tendency to equate masculinity with humanity in general, has also been documented in the field of psychology. A well-known and often-cited study by Inge Broverman and her colleagues reported that psychologists’ profiles of the mentally healthy person (when sex was not specified) corresponded to profiles of the healthy man. Profiles of the healthy or normal woman were different and included qualities—for example, dependency, emotionality, excitability—that were not considered signs of good mental health in a general, sexually unmarked context (Broverman et al. 1970).

Feminist scholars from a variety of different fields have pointed to how their respective disciplines have presented a male-oriented perspective on the human condition. The emergence of women’s studies programs is thus a reflection of the extent to which the apparently unmarked courses in the academic curriculum constitute a *de facto* men’s studies program. By teaching courses on women, focusing our research efforts on women, we bring those who have been in the darkness out into the light.

Anthropologists engaged in women’s studies often note that their approach is not merely additive, but rather calls for a basic rethinking of the relationship between the sexes. Their immediate contributions, however, have tended to be concerned fairly exclusively with women. This may have been a fruitful short-term strategy, but in the long run could become self-defeating, since it perpetuates the marked status of women. We

have, on the one side, women's studies and, on the other, the traditional fields of study, to varying degrees male-oriented but still ostensibly unmarked. Women are seen as a problem requiring some kind of special attention, while men are more or less taken for granted, or at least not focused upon in a comparably explicit way. But would it not be better to view men as being just as problematic as women? To insist that we need more studies of men *as men* — that is, studies based not on an uncritical assumption that what men do is more interesting or important than what women do, but studies carried out with a particular focus on gender?

Another problem with saying we are “studying women,” aside from the issue of markedness, is that this phrasing seems to designate a class of individual objects rather than an analytic category. It is important to stress that our subject is not “women” (or, for that matter, “men”) as groups of individuals, but rather gender as an aspect of social identity. We should be careful not to imply that identity is coterminous with gender.

In treating women as a group or category apart, we fail to pose a sufficiently pointed challenge to the traditional fields of scholarly inquiry. The charge that women have been relatively ignored by the social sciences, while true, does not adequately address the problem. The real issue, in my opinion, is that the social sciences have yet to come to terms with gender as a social fact. They have suffered from a tendency to relegate sex to the domain of the infra-social, to view sex roles largely in terms of how biology constrains society.<sup>3</sup> The message from current sex-role research is that gender must be viewed from the perspectives of economics, politics, religion, philosophy, art—in brief, that gender is a total social fact that takes on its meaning and function from the wider cultural system of which it is a part.

The task before us, as I see it, is one of making it as impossible for social scientists to avoid dealing with gender in their studies of social differentiation as it is for them to avoid dealing with such things as rank, class, and kinship. The goal is to integrate the study of gender differences into the central pursuits of the social sciences and, in turn, to see in what way these pursuits are modified and refined by understanding the particular features of gender as a principle of social organization. I do not know whether this is the impact that recent studies of women have as yet had on the social sciences generally, or on anthropology in

particular, but I maintain that it is the impact that they can have and should have.

Before considering the relationship between sex-role studies and the wider field of anthropology, I should say something about how I am using the terms "sex" and "gender." While these terms can mean a number of different things, I have found that they serve a particularly useful analytic purpose in contrasting a set of biological facts with a set of cultural facts. Were I to be scrupulous in my use of terms, I would use the term "sex" only when I was speaking of biological differences between males and females, and use "gender" whenever I was referring to the social, cultural, psychological constructs that are imposed upon these biological differences. The meaning of the term "gender," as I understand it, is thus not unlike its meaning for grammarians: it designates a set of categories to which we can give the same label cross-linguistically, or cross-culturally, because they have some connection to sex differences. These categories are, however, conventional or arbitrary insofar as they are not reducible to or directly derivative of natural, biological facts; they vary from one language to another, one culture to another, in the way in which they order experience and action.

The reader may notice that I have several times used the term "sex" when "gender" would have been the analytically appropriate choice. In doing this, I have bowed to common patterns of usage. I do not think this poses a serious problem, since context should make it clear whether I am speaking of biology or culture. The terminological opposition between sex and gender remains available for times when I want to draw an explicit contrast between biological differences and cultural patterns, and I make use of it for that purpose.

Let me now go on to discuss how gender studies fit within certain more general trends in anthropology and consider some of the theoretical issues they have raised. I will not be attempting any general survey of the literature.<sup>4</sup> I will limit myself to outlining a few major themes, drawing on selected studies for purposes of illustration. The themes I will be developing are the following: (1) how the study of gender fits within what has come to be known as symbolic anthropology; (2) how the study of gender has raised new theoretical problems for the understand-

ing of social hierarchy, or inequality; and (3) how the study of gender brings to the fore issues concerning the sociology of knowledge, a central concern of all social scientists.

### I. Gender and Symbol

Over the last couple of decades, there has been a movement within anthropology to focus particular attention on the symbolic dimension of human social life. Some of the major contributors to this orientation include such British anthropologists as Victor Turner, Edmund Leach, Rodney Needham, and Mary Douglas; in America, the major figures associated with this approach include Clifford Geertz and David Schneider. The theoretical orientation they represent has come to be known as symbolic anthropology, or cultural analysis. Actually, insofar as "culture," the master concept of anthropology, is defined in terms of the symbolic nature of human behavior, one might imagine that all of anthropology is symbolic anthropology. However, not all approaches in anthropology give equal emphasis to the symbolic function. Indeed, many theories in effect fail to take account of it at all. Symbolic anthropologists define themselves in opposition to those who view human behavior within naturalist, materialist or utilitarian perspectives. Symbolic anthropology has thus emerged as a theoretical alternative to such approaches in anthropology as cultural ecology (in which emphasis is given to the human group's need to adapt to its natural environment); cultural materialism (which combines technological/environmental determinism with an attempt to account for human social institutions in practical, utilitarian terms); and transactional, game theory orientations in which the focus is on the maximizing individual—another kind of utilitarian approach. Central to symbolic anthropology is the concept of the arbitrariness of the symbol. Cultures, like languages or literary texts, are meaningful systems; the goal when one approaches them is less explanation, as one understands this in the tradition of the natural sciences, than it is interpretation.

Studies of gender carried out within the framework of symbolic anthropology have helped us to realize that the meaning of male and female is neither self-evident nor everywhere the same. They have contributed toward the conceptualization of gender, discussed above, as an arbitrary or conventional system. Some of the best such work has come out of recent ethnographic

studies in Melanesia. As long ago as Gregory Bateson's classic study of the *naven* ceremony among the Iatmul of New Guinea (Bateson [1936] 1958), this part of the world has proven a particularly rich area for the study of beliefs about gender and the stylization of feminine and masculine behavior. Research carried out in recent years has deepened our understanding of beliefs about gender and sexuality, and shown how these beliefs must be understood within their wider cultural contexts. I will cite just a few studies to serve as examples.

In research carried out among the Etoro of highland New Guinea, Raymond Kelly has explored the cultural connections between sexuality, witchcraft, and beliefs about the nature of men and women (Kelly 1976). According to Kelly, the domains of witchcraft and sexual relations are ordered by a common set of concepts and should thus be studied together for the light they shed on one another. Both must be understood with reference to Etoro concepts of life-force, which may be increased or diminished, and the importance of semen as a vital substance determining the degree of a man's life-force. A man acquires semen in his early years and loses it in the course of his lifetime, both through acts of heterosexual intercourse and through serving as a donor to a younger male whose growth he thereby insures. The oral-genital transfer of semen links men together in a chain of being, through a closed energy system in which the younger literally feed upon the older and are nurtured at their expense. Heterosexual activity is associated with death and depletion for the man; the woman, for her part, serves as an agent of depletion without herself benefiting from the transfer of male substance. Because of the dangers heterosexual intercourse poses for the man, it is cause for considerable ambivalence and is hedged by many restrictions. These negative attitudes do not apply to homosexual activity; while such activity has a tragic dimension for the older partner, it is regarded as a necessary part of maturation and is viewed in a generally positive light.

In the Etoro social universe, witches, who may be either male or female, are those who prey upon the souls, or spirit doubles, of others and consume a portion of their victims' life-force in this manner. Witchcraft and sexual relations thus pose similar threats to a man's vital substance, and women can be compared to witches, who are depletors *par excellence*, the embodiment of



all that is antisocial and therefore evil. Moreover, if there is a metaphorical relationship between witches and women in general, the woman who tempts her husband into excessive sexual activity is likely to be seen as a true witch.

In the Etoro case, then, one achieves a richer understanding of gender and sexuality through taking account of such other aspects of culture as witchcraft beliefs. These domains interpenetrate, provide idioms for one another. It is important to see that the relationship works both ways: if gender and sexuality can serve as metaphors for other areas of life, so gender and sexuality take on their own meaning from other domains of experience. If we turn to our own society, we can see that the oppositions we draw between masculinity and femininity and the sense we make of sexual activity can only be understood with reference to a variety of cultural notions, of which competition, achievement, rationality, irrationality, love, and nature are but a few. The study of gender concepts, sex roles, and female-male relations thus becomes part of a more general symbolic analysis.

Kelly's account of the Etoro, it should be pointed out, presents the male perspective. This observation is not intended as a criticism of Kelly, who is an outstanding ethnographer and recognizes this limitation himself; in his view, it would have been impossible for a male researcher to work closely with Etoro women (Kelly 1976:47). What we must keep in mind is that we do not know which of the beliefs outlined by Kelly are generally shared by all Etoro and which are peculiar to the men. If women have a different set of beliefs, different perspectives on such matters as witchcraft and sexuality, these remain to be discovered and interpreted. The general question of the divergence between men's and women's world views, and the related issue of how the sex of the researcher may affect the outcome of the research, will be treated in a later section of this paper. For now, though, I would like to mention another symbolic analysis of gender which, as it happens, was produced by a woman anthropologist who was explicitly concerned with supplementing and correcting the account of a particular society that had been produced earlier by a male ethnographer.

There are certain societies that are part of the common culture of all anthropologists, since they have been the subject of a classic ethnography or set of ethnographies. One such case is that of the Trobriand Islanders, whose way of life was described



in the various writings of Bronislaw Malinowski. Among the anthropologists who have studied the Trobrianders more recently, one, Annette Weiner, came to focus her attention on Trobriand women, since she felt that Malinowski had failed to accord sufficient importance to women in his own accounts; notably, he had failed to appreciate the social and symbolic significance of women's role in the system of exchanges that occupies a central place in Trobriand life. Weiner's reanalyses of Trobriand society (Weiner 1976, 1979, 1980) emphasize the symbolic dimension of exchange; they provide interpretations of the exchange activities of men and women in terms of Trobriand cosmological beliefs about complementary roles of women and men in the reproduction of life, and in the development and replacement of social persons. Charging that social anthropologists have commonly taken too narrow a view of the social order, Weiner expands the scope of her analysis to include the cosmic order, providing new perspectives on Trobriand matriliney and the "power" of women.

Weiner's goals in analyzing Trobriand sex roles and gender concepts go beyond the interpretation of a particular society. She uses the Trobriand case as a basis for broad cross-cultural generalization about gender symbolism and the respective value different societies place on maleness and femaleness (Weiner 1976: 233-6). The Trobrianders become a prototypical case of all those societies that differ from us in their ability to recognize and accord proper value to certain presumably inherent qualities of womanhood.<sup>5</sup> We see here a convergence of the world view of the Trobrianders and the ideological concerns of the researcher (assuming that the ethnography is itself only minimally the anthropologist's own projection, a point we must keep in mind when approaching any ethnographic account). Trobriand woman, in standing for all that our own male-oriented culture denies, serves to "balance the books," to present an alternative reality in which women are seen as important and exercise significant kinds of power. She is a foil much as the Noble Savage was for philosophers commenting on European society from the sixteenth century onward.

It is interesting to compare Weiner's work with another symbolic analysis of gender that also occupies an important place in the emerging body of anthropological literature on women. Sherry Ortner has written an article based on the question of

whether male is to female as culture is to nature (Ortner 1974). Developing one of the major themes in the work of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, Ortner suggests that there is such a parallel. She gives biological reasons for why the equations between women and nature/men and culture might emerge as cross-cultural universals, but ultimately locates the equations and the asymmetry between them in the realm of ideology. She accounts for what she sees as a universal subordination of women to men by the universal social valuation of culture over nature. Ortner's argument has provoked much debate. One major question is whether the conceptual opposition she draws between nature and culture, and the hierarchical relationship between them, represent valid cross-cultural generalizations or are rather representations of our own culture's system of ideas.<sup>6</sup>

The basic impulse of symbolic anthropology has been toward the achievement of rich descriptions and interpretations of particular other cultures. Anthropologists working under this rubric have called into question traditional comparative frameworks that depend on pulling items of a cultural repertoire out of their contexts, and in coding as similar practices that may look alike but mean different things. There are some symbolic anthropologists, like Weiner and Ortner, who have sought to move beyond analyzing the symbol systems of individual cultures; here, the movement has been a direct leap into broad generalizations. The coming years will perhaps see progress toward achieving comparisons that are more detailed, close-grained, and revealing of the specific similarities and differences between the conceptualizations of gender found in various cultural settings. If the field of gender studies moves in this direction, it will be in a position to contribute to the elaboration of comparative strategies in symbolic anthropology more generally. In any event, it is clear that symbolic analyses of gender will continue to constitute a particularly fertile field for anthropological research and writing.<sup>7</sup>

## II. Gender and Social Hierarchy

Given the feminist context of recent anthropological research on sex roles and women, a central preoccupation in the literature has been the issue of sexual inequality. How should it be

described and analyzed? What are its causes? Is it universal? Is it inevitable?

My own doctoral research among the Yanomama Indians of northern Brazil dealt with the issue of sexual hierarchy, a topic I came to while doing field research during the late 60s. I tried to explore how we could characterize the asymmetry between men's and women's positions in society. I discussed differences in work patterns and social networks, contrasts in the degree of structural elaboration and formalization of men's and women's social roles, differential access of men and women to public statuses and valued sacred knowledge, and the control by men of the marriage system (Shapiro 1972, 1976). The attempt to arrive at a cross-cultural formulation of sexual inequality was also a major goal of what has been perhaps the most influential single publication in the anthropological field of women's studies, a volume of essays entitled *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974). Ortner's article appeared in this collection, complementing other contributions that analyzed the opposition between "domestic" and "public" domains and considered the effects of women's child-rearing role (Rosaldo 1974, Chodorow 1974).

Ortner's and Weiner's respective symbolic analyses of gender, outlined in the previous section, reflect this central concern with sexual inequality and illustrate the bipolar response of feminist scholars. One response is to affirm the universality of male dominance and to seek ways of accounting for it without falling into biological determinism. Another is to deny the generality of the pattern by producing cases to serve as counterexamples; anthropologists taking this position are concerned with showing how sexual differentiation may imply complementarity as well as inequality.

A number of anthropologists have attempted to explain cross-cultural differences and similarities in the positions of the sexes by means of one kind of economic theory or another. One attempt at a general comparison is a study by Ernestine Friedl (1975), which presents an overview of sex roles in foraging and horticultural societies. Friedl tries to account for the relative power of men and women in terms of who controls production and extra-domestic exchange. She explores reasons why men are generally more likely than women to obtain such control, but also tries to identify reasons for variation.<sup>8</sup>

Other economic approaches to the relative status of men and women have been more sharply focused around Marxist concepts. Marxist analyses can take essentially two forms. One is to approach the sexes themselves as if they were classes, and describe the relations between them in essentially the same language as one might use to analyze the relationship between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Concepts used to discuss control over the means of production are applied to the means of biological and social reproduction as well; patrilineal descent systems, for example, may be viewed in the light of how senior males appropriate the fruits of women's labor in reproduction and socialization (O'Laughlin 1974).

Another kind of Marxist approach lies in seeing the development of sexual inequality as a function of the emergence of class systems. Such studies have contributed importantly to an understanding of the significance of gender roles for the operation of class systems. As Leacock (1975) has pointed out, we must not think of women and the domestic realm as belonging to some separate sphere irrelevant for the economist analyzing capitalist society; on the contrary, particular patterns of gender roles and family organization are an intrinsic part of how this type of society operates.

The general attempt to explain sexual stratification by class stratification is, however, unsatisfactory; it simply flies in the face of too much ethnographic data. Such data are sometimes dismissed by Marxist scholars, who claim that accounts of sexual hierarchy in tribal societies are artifacts of colonial rule rather than accurate representations of aboriginal institutions. Anthropologists have, to be sure, generally been remiss in observing how the colonial context and history of contact have affected the subjects of their studies. There is, moreover, ample evidence of cases in which women's status declined sharply under colonial regimes; documenting this process has, in fact, been an important contribution of anthropologists and other social scientists working in the so-called Third World.<sup>9</sup> It is clear, however, that the ethnographic record does not support an attempt to blame male dominance on capitalism or to see sexual inequality as a legacy of colonialism. Nor can all "aboriginal" cases of sexual differentiation be read as involving complementarity rather than hierarchy, unless we are prepared to read our own case in those terms as well.

Marxist idealizations of sex-role differentiation in small-scale societies bring us back to the Noble Savage; what we are seeing is an attempt to seek a charter for social change in the myth of a Golden Age. This approach is also a way of avoiding one of the thornier problems that recent sex-role studies have raised for the field of anthropology, which is the question of whether and how we can go about adopting a critical perspective on societies very different from our own. The union between social science and social criticism is one thing when we are questioning our own institutions, moving in our own moral universe. If we engage in a critique of other cultures, however, do we risk engaging in what we have generally seen as the opposite of anthropology—missionization? Then there is the danger that lies in the other direction. In terms of social science theory, the alternatives to critical approaches—which emphasize such issues as conflict, inequality, exploitation, and contradiction—are theoretical orientations that at the least do not question and at the most positively celebrate things as they are. Do we operate with a theoretical double standard: a critique of society for us and functionalism for the natives?

The way out of these difficulties lies in the development of an appropriate comparative framework for dealing with social hierarchy. Gender studies should play a central role in this development, for which they have already provided an impetus. It has become clear from anthropological studies of sex roles carried out thus far that attempts to make cross-cultural comparisons about the “status” of women *per se* are problematic. Criteria appear to be either ethnocentric or governed by a misguided concept of objectivity, or both. There is also a growing realization on the part of some anthropologists that the status of women, or even the respective positions of women and men, cannot be approached as a self-contained issue. The study of gender ranking must be part of a more general inquiry into social hierarchy; patterns of gender asymmetry in a particular society are to be understood in the context of whatever other patterns of social inequality obtain in that society.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one way we can know whether to speak of a particular pattern of sex-role differentiation in terms of hierarchy or complementarity is to see its relationship to other patterns of social differentiation that are less ambiguously understandable in terms of inequality; we may, for example, compare the patterns of interac-

tion between men and women with those between individuals of the same sex but of different classes or ranks. We may inquire into the way in which gender serves as a metaphor for other modes of social asymmetry and vice versa.<sup>11</sup>

The comparative study of social inequality between the sexes depends upon the kind of research into gender symbolism that has been discussed above. Such research directs our attention to the symbolic component of social hierarchy and domination. As Kelly points out, beliefs like those the Etoro hold about witchcraft and sexual relations constitute “a mechanism for the production of an elementary system of inequality based on age and sex” (Kelly 1976: 51).

### III. Gender and the Sociology of Knowledge

In the course of my own attempt to provide a general characterization of sexual hierarchy in a South American Indian society, mentioned earlier, I had occasion to consider men’s and women’s differential access to knowledge. In subsequent years, this issue has become a focus for ethnographic analysis and theoretical speculation. Anthropologists have come to think in terms not only of who controls the material means of production, but who dominates the means of symbolic production as well; they have raised the question of whether men and women who are members of the same society can be said to form “subcultures.” In brief, gender studies have brought to the fore issues concerning the sociology of knowledge—a matter of central concern to the social sciences generally. Within anthropology, the approach to the sociology of knowledge has been largely in the Durkheimian mode, in which the internal homogeneity of societies is emphasized and shared representational systems are viewed as reflections of overall social structure. Sex-role studies have underlined the importance of internal social differentiation and its effects on what anthropologists refer to as “culture.”

Recent ethnographic studies have shown that different pictures of the same society can emerge depending on whether one sees that society through the eyes of its male or its female members. One of the more influential of these studies is Jane Goodale’s ethnography of marriage among the Tiwi, a northern Australian Aboriginal group (Goodale 1971). In the anthropological literature, marriage systems are generally analyzed from a male perspective. In showing us what the system



looks like from the other side, Goodale is able to clarify certain features of kinship and marriage in an Australian society, making more comprehensible what has traditionally been one of the knottier areas of ethnography. (It is interesting to note that Goodale entitled her book *Tiwi Wives*, while an earlier ethnography of the Tiwi and their marriage system that focused on men and was written by two male ethnographers—Hart and Pilling 1960—was entitled simply *The Tiwi of Northern Australia*.)

It has been suggested in a number of recent studies that cultures of male dominance may, in fact, be men's cultures, not shared by women who have their own ideas about what is important in life. Some anthropologists have attempted to investigate the conditions for the emergence of a women's subculture and also to determine whether it functions to support or challenge the society's dominant values (see, for example, Murphy and Murphy 1974, Sutton et al. 1975, and Dwyer 1978).

Of all of the attempts that have thus far been made to apply a sociology of knowledge to sex-role studies, the one that has generated the most discussion is an article by Edwin Ardener, a British social anthropologist, entitled "Belief and the Problem of Women" (Ardener 1972). Ardener claims that it is generally males who control the mode of symbolic production in a society and are the major creators of its dominant world view; women's perspectives remain "muted." Ardener goes on to tie this difference in men's and women's world views to the problem of bias in ethnography by proposing that the models male informants provide are the kinds of models that will be understandable to social anthropologists (who are either men themselves or women who have presumably been socialized within a male-oriented intellectual tradition). According to Ardener, the analytic tools we have at hand as anthropologists do not prepare us to hear or understand the views held by women.<sup>12</sup>

The issue of male bias, raised in Ardener's critique of anthropological models of social structure and symbol systems, has received a considerable amount of attention in the literature on gender.<sup>13</sup> This concern over sex bias dovetails with a more general self-consciousness that has characterized the profession in recent years. Anthropologists have, at various times in the history of the discipline, shown a special sensitivity to the subjective dimension of ethnographic research. They have realized the need for learning how properties of the human recording



instrument affect the record obtained. In the 1930s, when Freudian ideas were particularly influential in American society, it was sometimes suggested that anthropologists be psychoanalyzed before going into the field. The phase of self-awareness that anthropology has entered into more recently has developed within a different context—an amalgam of philosophical influences (notably, from the fields of phenomenology and hermeneutics) and the political auto-criticism of a profession that has belatedly acknowledged its relationship to colonialism.

Within this context of reflexiveness, we can investigate how gender, among other things, influences our perspectives as ethnographers. We are coming to understand how sex bias has skewed our vision in a number of areas, including human evolution. Unfortunately the effect of gender on scholarship is not always dealt with in as sophisticated a fashion as one might wish. For one thing, there is commonly a failure to distinguish consistently between sex bias emanating from the observer and sex bias characteristic of the community under study. A deeper and more complex problem has to do with the labeling of certain ideas as “male” or “female.” It is one thing to identify the sex of someone who is expressing an idea or of the group most likely to benefit from it; determining authorship, however, is another matter, not to mention establishing a connection between gender and the form or content of the idea itself. Ardener’s views on male bias, while containing some specific suggestions about the respective cosmological beliefs of men and women, are somewhat murky in their wider implications. Is it being suggested that the entire conceptual apparatus of anthropology is “male-oriented”? If so, how much of it must be totally reformulated, and what would the result look like? Are female ethnographers more likely than male ethnographers to develop a receptivity to the “muted” thought systems of women in the societies we study?

Implicit in many discussions of sex bias, and in much of the literature in women’s studies more generally, is the assumption that only women can or should study women—what we might call the *it-takes-one-to-know-one* position. This attitude, prompted by a feminist awareness of the distorting views of women held by the largely male social scientific establishment, also finds support in the practicalities of field work; the division between men’s and women’s social worlds is sharply drawn in a

large number of societies. Tendencies toward a sexual division of labor in our profession, however, require critical reflection more than they require epistemological justification or a new source of ideological support. After all, if it really took one to know one, the entire field of anthropology would be an aberration.

One of the more extreme statements on male bias (Rohrlich-Leavitt, Sykes, and Weatherford 1975) asserts that there is not only an anthropology of women, but an anthropology by women. The authors survey some of the respective contributions of male and female anthropologists to the study of Australian Aboriginal societies, and present a general theoretical argument to support their view that women are superior ethnographers. This article is of interest in that it develops explicitly certain assumptions that appear covertly in some of the other sex-role literature and, in so doing, reveals the confused and contradictory nature of these assumptions. First of all, Rohrlich-Leavitt et al. presume that a female anthropologist has the capacity to understand the subjective experience of her female informants just by virtue of the common sex bond, a highly questionable presumption. The woman ethnographer's ability to identify with her female informants is commended as an ability to achieve the insider's perspective (something men are said to be unable to do), while the male ethnographer's identification with his male informants is seen as bias (a disability to which women ethnographers are apparently immune). There is a certain piquancy in the reversal here: double standards of this sort, that operate through switching labels for the same thing, generally work against women. They are not, however, any more tenable when they work against men.

Rohrlich-Leavitt et al. maintain that women have a greater capacity not only for subjectivity but for objectivity as well—not the pseudo-objectivity of male anthropologists (which is seen as an alienating form of scientific manipulation), but an objectivity resulting from women's position as socially marginal. Women, by virtue of being an oppressed class that has to deal with a dominant class, achieve the kind of "double consciousness" that also characterizes economically exploited and racially stigmatized groups. The concept of double consciousness is an interesting one, but cannot be applied in a naive manner. In general, the issues dealt with by these anthropologists—the

respective advantages and limitations of insiders' and outsiders' perspectives, the problem of objectivity and the question of whether one sub-group in society is more likely to possess it than another—have occupied the attention of major social theorists. We cannot consider the problem solved, but neither should we expend our efforts on trying to reinvent the wheel.

This brings me back to the general position I argued in the opening section of this paper: that gender studies should be integrated into mainstream social science research. Let me emphasize here that the process has to work both ways. The enduring contributions to gender studies are being made by those who are not only concerned with transforming the social sciences, but also able to make use of the major past accomplishments of their disciplines.

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Recent sex-role studies have been characterized by a convergence of scholarly and political concerns. The energy generated by this merging of purposes has resulted not only in contributions to anthropological knowledge, but also in some welcome changes in the respective roles of women and men in the profession.

It may now be time for gender studies to move beyond the stage where scientific and scholarly goals were so closely tied to political and personal ones. There is generally some connection, to be sure, but we should seek to make that connection the subject of productive intellectual struggle rather than an influence leading us to adhere unreflectingly to a particular set of concerns. Several students of gender have come to worry about the extent to which we have been projecting our own historically specific situation onto the lives and experiences of those we study; we need to be receptive to encountering the unfamiliar in the field of gender studies, as in ethnographic research more generally.

The danger in too close an association between scholarship and social reformism is not only in the limits it places on intellectual inquiry, but also in the implication that our activities as social, moral, and political beings are dependent on what we are able to discover in our scientific research. Loosening the tie would have liberating consequences both for gender studies as an area of anthropological investigation and for feminism as a

social movement. It is toward this stage that we are perhaps moving now.

## NOTES

1. There were, to be sure, important earlier anthropological contributions to the cross-cultural study of gender, including the well-known work of Margaret Mead and the descriptions of sex role differentiation that can be found, to varying degrees, in most standard ethnographic monographs. With the exception of certain culture-and-personality anthropologists like Mead, however, and those few ethnographers who gave sex roles a central place in their descriptive work, gender was not considered an important focus for anthropological research and theorizing and did not mobilize the energies of large numbers of anthropologists until recently. In this discussion, I am concentrating on contributions that have come out of this more recent period.
2. A discussion of how markedness operates on various levels of language can be found in Lyons 1968. The term is first defined on pp. 79–80.
3. A similar point can be made about age. It would be interesting to trace the parallel development of a sociology of sex differences and a sociology of age differences.
4. I have had occasion to do a state-of-the-art survey in an earlier publication (Shapiro 1979). Other comprehensive review articles include Lamphere 1977, Quinn 1977, Rogers 1978, and Tiffany 1978.
5. As another Melanesianist has pointed out (Strathern 1981), Weiner is here doing something very similar to what Malinowski had done before her: setting up Trobriand man (or, in this case, woman), in opposition to Western man (or woman) as a model for humanity in general. This kind of secondary ethnocentrism is an occupational hazard of anthropology, an understandable outcome of the long, intense, and difficult business of trying to learn about another culture. Commonly labeled “Bongo-Bongoism,” it paradoxically combines a habit of undermining generalizations because they do not happen to fit one’s own ethnographic experience with a propensity of viewing the world at large from the vantage point of the particular society one has studied.
6. Rogers (1978: 134–35) has noted that the association of women with nature and men with culture is not as straightforward even in our society as Ortner seems to indicate. A more extensive examination of the concepts of nature and culture in Western societies, and their development over time, can be found in various of the articles in MacCormack and Strathern 1980; other articles in this collection address the issue of how these concepts do or do not fit the world views of other societies.
7. Two important new contributions to this body of literature are the recently published set of essays edited by MacCormack and Strathern (1980) and a forthcoming collection of papers edited by Ortner and Whitehead (in press).
8. A more detailed exposition of Friedl’s argument, and a discussion of similar approaches, can be found in Shapiro 1979: 270–77.
9. A comprehensive discussion of this issue, supported by data from different geographical regions, can be found in Boserup 1970.
10. Rosaldo (1980) has also made this general argument.

11. Strathern, for example, discusses how gender ranking serves as a means for expressing hierarchy among men in Melpa society (Highland New Guinea), and how the contrast between "big men" and "rubbish men," in turn, informs the way in which sexual asymmetry itself is viewed (Strathern 1976).
12. Shirley Ardener has edited a collection of ethnographic essays devoted to pursuing this line of investigation; Edwin Ardener's original article is reprinted in the volume (S. Ardener 1975).
13. Dickerson ([1980] n.d.) provides an overview of how the recent sex-role literature has dealt with the issue of male bias in anthropology, giving special attention to the various political and theoretical concerns that have motivated the inquiry. Milton (1979) and Strathern (in press) present detailed critiques of the concept of male bias and the uses to which it is put.

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