

Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender and Kinship

*Sylvia Junko Yanagisako and
Jane Fishburne Collier*

THIS ESSAY attempts to draw together and advance the theoretical contribution that feminist rethinking of gender has made to our understanding of both gender and kinship.* Our answer to the question of what a feminist perspective has to offer the study of gender and kinship is that, above all, it can generate new puzzles and, thereby, make possible new answers.

A productive first step in rethinking any subject is to make what once seemed apparent cry out for explanation. Anthropologists inspired by the women's movement in the late 1960's took such a step when they questioned whether male dominance was a cross-cultural universal and, if so, why (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Reiter 1975; Friedl 1975). By asking what explained sexual inequality, they rejected it as an unchangeable, natural fact and redefined it as a social fact.† A second step entailed questioning the homogeneity of the categories "male" and "female" themselves and investigating their diverse social meanings among different societies (Rosaldo and Atkinson 1975; Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Strathern 1981a). Once we recognized that these categories are defined in different ways in specific societies, we no longer took them as a priori, universal categories upon which particular relations of

*This paper was written after the 1982 conference on Feminism and Kinship Theory in Anthropology. We wish to thank Jane Atkinson, Donald Donham, Sherry Ortner, Roger Rouse, David Schneider, Judith Shapiro, Anna Tsing, and Harriet Whitehead for their helpful comments and criticisms. This paper is a contribution to the ongoing debate within feminist anthropology. The views we express are not necessarily shared by the colleagues whose comments and criticisms helped us to sharpen our arguments.

†Although we recognize that some anthropologists questioned the universality of Western concepts of gender before the late 1960's, we begin with the 1960's women's movement because it inspired the arguments we discuss in this paper.

gender hierarchy are constructed. Instead, the social and cultural processes by which these categories are constituted came to be seen as one and the same as those creating inequality between men and women.

In this essay, we suggest that the next puzzle we must generate and then solve is the *difference* between men and women. Rather than taking for granted that "male" and "female" are two natural categories of human beings whose relations are everywhere structured by their difference, we ask whether this is indeed the case in each society we study and, if so, what specific social and cultural processes cause men and women to *appear* different from each other. Although we do not deny that biological differences exist between men and women (just as they do among men and among women), our analytic strategy is to question whether these differences are the universal basis for the cultural categories "male" and "female." In other words, we argue against the notion that cross-cultural variations in gender categories and inequalities are merely diverse elaborations and extensions of the same natural fact.

We begin our essay with a critical review of a number of analytical dichotomies that have guided much of the literature on gender in anthropology and related disciplines for the past decade, and we conclude that they assume that gender is everywhere rooted in the same difference. Our point is that, in doing so, these dichotomies take for granted what they should explain. In the second section of this essay, we discuss commonalities between the assumptions underlying these dichotomies and the assumptions that have dominated kinship studies in anthropology since their beginnings in the nineteenth century. We argue that gender and kinship have been defined as fields of study by our folk conception of the same thing, namely, the biological facts of sexual reproduction. Consequently, what have been conceptualized as two discrete fields of study constitute a single field that has not succeeded in freeing itself from notions about natural differences between people. In the final section of the essay, we propose a multifaceted strategy for transcending the analytical categories and dichotomies that have dominated past studies of kinship and gender. Because the analytical program we suggest requires study of culturally constructed social inequalities, we begin with a critique of the concept of "egalitarian society." We then suggest an analytical program that entails explicating the dynamic cultural systems of meanings through which different kinds

of historically specific systems of inequality are realized and transformed.

Questioning Analytical Dichotomies in the Study of Gender

In questioning analytical dichotomies, we first examine those of "nature/culture" (Ortner 1974), "domestic/public" (Rosaldo 1974), and "reproduction/production" (see Harris and Young 1981). Each of these has been said to structure relations between men and women in all societies and, therefore, to offer a universal explanation of sexual inequality. Whereas the dichotomies of domestic/public and nature/culture are more in line with structuralist perspectives, the distinction between reproduction and production has emerged from a functionalist-Marxist perspective.

Second, we examine implicit dichotomies between women's and men's consciousnesses. Scholars (for example, Rohrlich-Leavitt, Sykes, and Weatherford 1975; Weiner 1976) seeking to correct the androcentric bias in ethnographic accounts by advocating attention to "women's point of view" have posited a distinction between men's and women's perspectives of social relationships. Arguing that most anthropological monographs reflected men's views of how their system worked, they suggested we correct this bias by including women's accounts of social and cultural institutions in our ethnographies. In contrast, Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead (1981) have more recently proposed a focus on male prestige systems, not as a way of correcting male bias, but as a way of understanding the cultural construction of gender. These latter authors, however, share with the former the notion that men and women—as unitary and opposed categories—have different views of how their mutual system works.

Domestic/Public and Nature/Culture

Ortner and Whitehead propose that the nature/culture and domestic/public oppositions, along with the distinction between self-interest and the social good identified by Marilyn Strathern (1981b), derive from the same sociological insight: "that the sphere of social activity predominantly associated with males encompasses the sphere predominantly associated with females and is, for that reason, culturally accorded higher value" (1981: 7–8). The emphasis placed on any one of these specific contrasts, they suggest,

depends upon the theoretical interests of the analyst and the empirically observed "idiom" of a particular culture; however, "all could be present without inconsistency; all are in a sense transformations of one another" (1981: 8).

Since these dichotomies were first presented a little over ten years ago as explanations of universal sexual asymmetry, both the domestic/public dichotomy proposed by Michelle Rosaldo (1974) and the nature/culture opposition proposed by Sherry Ortner (1974) have come under considerable criticism. Ortner's hypothesis that the symbolic association of a lesser valued "nature" with females and of a more highly valued, transcendent "culture" with males is the basis for the universal devaluation of females has been most persuasively and thoroughly criticized in Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern's volume *Nature, Culture, and Gender* (1980). In their introduction to this collection of essays, MacCormack and Strathern pose the crucial question, When can we usefully translate a symbolic opposition found in another culture into one found in ours? Together the case studies in their volume argue that our nature/culture opposition does not do justice to the range of symbolic configurations of gender meanings found in other societies.

Strathern (1980), for one, builds a convincing case that the Hagen opposition between "mbo" and "rømi" is not homologous to the nature/culture opposition in our culture, but has both different symbolic meaning and social consequences. The strength of Strathern's argument rests as much on her explication of *our* conception of the nature/culture dichotomy as on Hagen conceptions. This kind of effort has been too often slighted in discussions about the universality of cultural features—whether the disputed features are symbolic oppositions or social institutions such as "marriage" or "incest." In other words, in many instances our erroneous assumptions about the concepts of other people are coupled with erroneous assumptions about the simplicity or homogeneity of our own cultural concepts. As Maurice and Jean Bloch point out, we cannot assume that the terms we use in our own cultural discourse provide a straightforward, unambiguous analytical focus (1980: 125).

Bloch and Bloch's historical analysis of the changing usage of "nature" as a category for challenging the prevailing cultural order in eighteenth-century France (1980) reveals a particularly crucial dimension that is missed by the claim for a universal nature/culture

opposition—a synchronic dimension that permits change. Like all universal structural oppositions, this one necessarily flattens dynamic transformations of meanings into static structural sameness. Consequently, it tends to impede the elucidation of the historical processes through which systems of meanings change.

This absence of a historical dynamic is closely tied to another problem inherent in the claim for a universal symbolic opposition. This is the problem of conceptualizing symbolic systems as if they exist apart from social action. Only if we construed symbolic systems as having a structure independent of social action could we claim that a symbolic opposition of gender categories is universal without claiming that a system of gender relations is universal. Such a view is the result of too dichotomized a vision of ideas and action. Thus, the issue is not whether the Hagen concept of "mbo" stands in relation to the Hagen concept of "rómi" as our concept of "culture" stands in relation to our concept of "nature," but, rather, whether mbo/rómi constitutes the same system of social relations in Hagen society as nature/culture does in ours. Put another way, the question we should ask is, What do these oppositions *do* for social relations and, conversely, how do people encounter these oppositions in their practice of social relations?

Whereas the nature/culture opposition draws on a Lévi-Straussian symbolic-structuralist perspective, the domestic/public opposition is more in line with a structural-functionalist perspective of the sort that has prevailed in the field of kinship studies. Michelle Rosaldo first construed the domestic/public opposition as the "basis of a structural framework" necessary to explain the general identification of women with domestic life and men with public life and the consequent universal, cross-cultural asymmetry in the evaluation of the sexes. At the core of this identification of women with domestic life lay their role as mothers: "Women become absorbed primarily in domestic activities because of their role as mothers. Their economic and political activities are constrained by the responsibilities of childcare and the focus of their emotions and attentions is particularistic and directed toward children and the home" (Rosaldo 1974: 24).

Although she did not initially draw a link between the domestic/public opposition and the distinction between the domestic domain and the politico-jural domain, which had long been employed in kinship studies (Fortes 1958, 1969), Rosaldo later (1980)

acknowledged that link and its problematic theoretical implications (Yanagisako 1979). She came to share Rayna Reiter's (1975) view of the domestic/public opposition as an ideological product of our society and a legacy of our Victorian heritage that "cast the sexes in dichotomous and contrastive terms" (Rosaldo 1980: 404). As John Comaroff notes in this volume, such a dichotomous vision of society is logically entailed in a "universal asymmetry" thesis that relies upon an orthodox image of the form and content of the two domains. Conversely, arguments against the universality of sexual asymmetry and inequality have necessarily engaged in a critical reexamination of this image. As Rapp (1979) and Comaroff (this volume) point out, however, these latter efforts have encompassed a range of feminist theoretical perspectives.

Attempts to salvage the domestic/public opposition—which continue to accept the two categories as a valid description of a universal reality even though varying widely in their specific content and interpenetration—cannot escape the self-defeating circularity inherent in its initial formulation (Comaroff this volume). As Yanagisako points out in this collection, the claim that women become absorbed in domestic activities because of their role as mothers is tautological given the definition of "domestic" as "those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children" (Rosaldo 1974: 23).

The a priori definition of the domestic domain by the mother-child relation is inextricably linked with the troubling analytical problems arising from its claim for universality. These are shared by the nature/culture opposition. As Karen Sacks (1976, 1979), Eleanor Leacock (1978), and Alice Schlegel (1977) have argued convincingly, those writers who assert the universality of sexual asymmetry encourage the search for biological causes, even though such writers explicitly emphasize social processes. In their contributions to *Woman, Culture, and Society*, Rosaldo and Ortner both proposed social causes for universal sexual asymmetry, as did Nancy Chodorow in her contribution to the 1974 book, but each author focused on the social construction of a biological "fact": women's capacity to bear and nurse infants. The obvious conclusion is that biological motherhood "explains" the universal devaluation of women. As Rosaldo herself later noted, a focus on universals makes us "victims of a conceptual tradition that discovers 'essence'

in the natural characteristics" that distinguish the sexes, "and then declares that women's present lot derives from what, 'in essence,' women are" (1980: 401).

In summary, we suggest that Ortner and Whitehead's claim that the domestic/public and nature/culture oppositions are transformations of each other is valid (1981: 7–8), although not because these oppositions summarize, each in a way more suited to the theoretical interests of a particular analyst or the cultural idiom of a particular society, a universal structure of gender relations. Rather, domestic/public and nature/culture, like the reproduction/production distinction we discuss below, are variations of an analytical dichotomy that takes for granted what we think should be explained.

Reproduction/Production

In the last decade, several writers (for example, Eisenstein 1979; Benería and Sen 1981; Harris and Young 1981), attempting to develop a Marxist theory of gender while at the same time bringing a feminist perspective to Marxist theory, have argued for the need to develop a theory of relations of reproduction. Olivia Harris and Kate Young (1981: 110) note that the proliferation of studies in Marxist literature centered on the concept of reproduction reflects not only feminist concern with the status of women but, among other things, the concern of some Marxists to "break conclusively with economic versions of a Marxism which places too great an emphasis on the forces of production" (see, for example, Hindness and Hirst 1975; Friedman 1976). Women have been cast as the "means of reproduction" in several Marxist discussions of the control of labor and its reproduction in both capitalist and precapitalist societies.

Claude Meillassoux's (1981) evolutionary theory of the domestic community is perhaps the most ambitious of these works in its attempt to build an analysis of the family into a Marxist analysis of imperialism. For Meillassoux, control over the labor of individual human beings is more important than control over the means of production in defining the relations of production in agricultural societies where productive forces are not highly developed. The reproduction of the domestic community of these societies is contingent upon the reproduction of human beings and, consequently, upon control over women, whom Meillassoux views as the means of that reproduction. In capitalist societies, on the other hand, cap-

ital is unable itself to reproduce the labor power necessary for social reproduction. Therefore, it must rely on both precapitalist modes of production, such as exist in Third World countries, and on the family—in particular, women's work in it, in industrial society—as the means of reproduction of labor power.

Feminists have strongly criticized two inextricably linked aspects of Meillassoux's theory: his analytical treatment of women and his concept of reproduction. They challenge his view of women solely as "reproducers" and his neglect of their productive activities (Harris and Young 1981; O'Laughlin 1977), which blind him to the ways in which the social constraints placed on women's productive activities, as well as the control placed on their reproductive activities, structure their oppression. They point to the ironic lack of attention to what is commonly called "domestic work" in a book dedicated to the analysis of reproduction.

These limitations in Meillassoux's work can be largely traced to the considerable ambiguity surrounding his use of the term reproduction, which conflates biological reproduction with the reproduction of the social system. For Meillassoux, kinship is the institution which at once regulates the function of the reproduction of human beings and the reproduction of the entire social formation (Meillassoux 1981: xi). This functionalist perspective also underlies his assumption—one common in much of the anthropological literature—that precapitalist societies are in static equilibrium. Thus, despite his interest in the evolution of social forms, Meillassoux ends up with a Marxist version of teleological functionalism in which "all modes exist to reproduce themselves" (Harris and Young 1981: 115).

Unfortunately, many critics attempting to compensate for Meillassoux's inattention to "domestic work" have employed a concept of reproduction similar to his. As a consequence, their work has also been characterized by conceptual confusion. These writers take as their starting point Engels's formulation of the distinction between reproduction and production. In contrast to Marx (1967: 566), who used these terms to describe a unitary social process, Engels tended to treat production and reproduction as two distinct, although coordinated, aspects of the process of social production: "This again, is of a twofold character: on the one side the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing, and shelter and the tools necessary for that reproduction; on the other side the

production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species" (1972: 71).

It is not surprising that Engels's formulation would receive so much recent attention from Marxist-feminist social scientists, as it is one of the few early Marxist statements offering an explicit approach to gender. Much of the literature on the subject of women and capitalist development, for example, employs this distinction. In their 1981 critique of Ester Boserup's neoclassical, comparative study of the role of women in economic development (1970), the economists Lourdes Benería and Gita Sen argue that we should attend to the role of reproduction in determining women's position in society. They rightly fault Boserup for her distinction between "economic activity" and "domestic work," which results in her excluding such activities as food processing—largely a female activity—from her description of economic activity in agricultural societies. Their concept of reproduction, however, proves more a liability than an asset. They define reproduction as not only biological reproduction and daily maintenance of the labor force but also social reproduction, that is, the perpetuation of social systems (Benería and Sen 1981: 290). Yet, in their analysis of the ways in which the status of women has changed with economic transformations, reproduction is reduced to "domestic work." Accordingly, when they discuss industrial society, they equate "housework" with reproductive work and assume the household is the focal point of all sorts of reproduction (Benería and Sen 1981: 293, 291).

The social historians Louise Tilly and Joan Scott also employ a similar distinction in their history of women's work in industrializing England and France. Reproduction is for them, by definition, a gendered category: "Reproductive activity is used here as a shorthand for the whole set of women's household activities: childbearing, child rearing, and day-to-day management of the consumption and production of services for household members" (Tilly and Scott 1980: 6). This unfortunate equation of reproductive activity with *women's* household activities excludes anything men do from the category of reproductive activity and, consequently, is blind to men's contribution to "childbearing, child rearing and day-to-day management of the consumption and production of services for household members." This, in turn, makes it impossible for Tilly and Scott to attain their goal of writing a history of the changing re-

lation between the reproductive work of women and men. There can be no such history of change when, by their own definition, men do not engage in reproductive work.

The best attempt to clarify the confusion surrounding usages of the term reproduction and its relation to production is Olivia Harris and Kate Young's comprehensive review of the concept (1981). Having found fault with Meillassoux's concept of reproduction, Harris and Young propose to salvage it by isolating different meanings of the concept, which they see located at "different levels of abstraction and generality" and which "entail different types of causality and different levels of determination." "Here we have isolated three senses of the concept of reproduction for discussion which seem to us to cover the major uses of the term and to illustrate the confusion that has resulted from their conflation. We feel it is necessary to distinguish social reproduction, that is, the overall reproduction of a particular social formation from the reproduction of labor itself; and further to distinguish the latter from the specific forms of biological reproduction" (Harris and Young 1981: 113).

By teasing apart these different meanings of reproduction, Harris and Young do an excellent job of displaying the density and complexity of the concept. Yet, their attempt to place these meanings in distinct and analytically useful levels generates new problems. It becomes quickly apparent just how difficult it is for them to separate their notion of the reproduction of labor and their notion of social reproduction. They admit that: "to talk of the reproduction of labour is in itself perhaps too limited; it would be more accurate to talk of the reproduction of adequate bearers of specific social relationships, since we also wish to include under this category classes of non-labourers" (Harris and Young 1981: 113). Once the reproduction of labor slips into the reproduction of "adequate bearers of specific social relations"—a process that presumably includes such social categories as "males" and "females" as well as "lineage elders" and "capitalists"—it becomes indistinguishable from the process of social reproduction. That is to say, if "capitalists" are being reproduced, then relations of capital must be simultaneously reproduced; just as, if "males" and "females" are being reproduced, then gender relations must be reproduced.

As do all the authors who draw upon Engels's distinction between production and reproduction, Harris and Young locate the construction of gender relations—and, consequently, women's

subordination—in the reproductive process. The productive process, regardless of the particular mode of production it comprises, is conceptualized as theoretically independent of gender considerations. Like the notion that relations of reproduction are more homogeneous and unchanging than relations of production, this line of thought grants the two spheres of activities an analytical autonomy that seems unjustified.

What lies behind the willingness of so many authors to overlook the conceptual ambiguity and confusion of the reproduction/production distinction and to remain committed to its usefulness for understanding gender relations? Behind this distinction, we suggest, is a symbolically meaningful and institutionally experienced opposition that our own culture draws between the production of people and the production of things. When Harris and Young consider the reproduction of a particular social formation—which in Marxist terms entails the reproduction of a particular mode of production—they do not see gender as relevant because, although both women and men are involved in production, they do not appear to be involved as “men” and “women.” In other words, their gender attributes do not appear to be crucial in structuring their relations. Yet, Harris and Young see women as “women” and men as “men” when they are involved in the reproduction of labor and biological reproduction because in our cultural system of meanings, the production of people is thought to occur through the process of sexual procreation. Sexual procreation, in turn, is construed as possible because of the biological *difference* between men and women. The production of material goods, in contrast, is not seen as being about sex, and thus it is not necessarily rooted in sexual difference, even when two sexes are involved in it.

In this folk model, which informs much of the social scientific writing on reproduction and production, the two categories are construed as functionally differentiated spheres of activity that stand in a means/end relation to each other. Our experience in our own society is that work in production earns money, and money is the means by which the family can be maintained and, therefore, reproduced. At the same time, the reverse holds: the family and its reproduction of people through love and sexual procreation are the means by which labor—and thus the productive system of society—is reproduced. Although we realize that wage work, money, and factories do not exist in many of the societies we study, we im-

pose our own institutional divisions and culturally meaningful categories onto them by positing the universal existence of functionally differentiated spheres of activity. In our folk model, we contrast the following pairs, each linked, respectively, to the productive and reproductive spheres:

material goods	people
technology	biology
male or gender neutral	female or gendered
wage work	nonwage work
factory	family
money	love

A means/end relation between the family and capitalism has prevailed in Western sociological thought, not only in the writings of Marxist functionalists but in those of structural-functionalist theorists as well. In Talcott Parsons's theory of the family in capitalist-industrial society (Parsons and Bales 1955), the particular form of the family helps to reproduce the “economic system” by permitting the social and geographic mobility required by an open-class, universalistic, achievement-based occupational system while still providing for the socialization of children and nurturance of adults. In sum, both Parsonian structural-functionalist theory and Marxist-functionalist theory posit a means/end relationship between what they construe as the reproductive and productive spheres of capitalist-industrial society.

At the bottom of the analytical confusion surrounding the reproduction/production dichotomy is a circularity similar to that which has plagued the domestic/public distinction. Like the former analytical opposition, it leads us back to reinventing, in a new form, the same dualism we were trying to escape.

Women's Consciousness / Men's Consciousness

One of the first changes called for by feminist scholars in the social sciences was the correction of androcentric views that had paid little attention not only to women's activities and roles but also to their views of social relationships and cultural practices. This feminist challenge was useful in calling into question seemingly natural social units. Among the social units taken for granted were the “families” that anthropologists continued to discover everywhere as long as they confounded genealogically defined relationships

with particular kinds of culturally meaningful, social relationships (Yanagisako 1979; Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako 1982). The feminist questioning (for example, Collier 1974; Lamphere 1974; Harris 1981; Wolf 1972) of the assumed unity of families, households, and other sorts of domestic groups denaturalized these units by asking whether their members had the same or different views, interests, and strategies. The recognition of the diversity and, in some cases, the conflict of interests among the members of supposedly solidary groups opened the way to a richer understanding of the dynamics of these groups (for example, Wolf 1972; Yanagisako 1985) and their interaction with other social units.

At the same time, we have come to realize that correcting the androcentrism of the past without reproducing its conceptual error in inverted form requires considerable rethinking of our notions of culture and ideology. We appear to have left behind naive claims (for example, Rohrllich-Leavitt, Sykes, and Weatherford 1975) that female anthropologists intuitively understand the subjective experience of their female informants simply by dint of their sex. Likewise, we have rejected claims for a universal "woman's point of view" or a universal "womanhood." Marilyn Strathern has argued convincingly that "it is to mistake symbol for index to imagine that what Trobrianders make out of women identifies something essential about *womankind*. We merely learn, surely, how it is that cultures constitute themselves" (1981a: 671). Furthermore, we cannot assume that *within* a society there is a unitary "woman's point of view" that crosscuts significant differences in, for example, age, household position, or social class.

Despite this skepticism about the existence of a unitary "woman's point of view" in any society, the notion that there is a unitary "man's point of view" appears more resilient (for example, Ardener 1972). Because men are socially dominant over women, it is tempting to treat the cultural system of a society as a product of their values and beliefs and to assume that it is shared by most, if not all, of them. This assumption is implicit in the concept of a "male prestige system," which Ortner and Whitehead (1981) have proposed for understanding, among other things, the connections between gender and kinship.

Ortner and Whitehead suggest that in all societies the most important structures for the cultural construction of gender are the "structures of prestige." Moreover, because some form of male

dominance operates in every society, "the cultural construction of sex and gender tends everywhere to be stamped by the prestige considerations of socially dominant male actors" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 12). "Women's perspectives are to a great extent constrained and conditioned by the dominant ideology. The analysis of the dominant ideology must thus precede, or at least encompass, the analysis of the perspective of women" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: x). In the above quotations, Ortner and Whitehead assume that men's perspectives are not also constrained and conditioned by the dominant ideology. Instead, in the case of men, ideology and the perspectives of social actors are conflated. This, of course, assumes a priori that men and women have distinctly different perspectives, including different ideas about prestige relations.

The problems generated by this conceptualization of the dominant ideology are manifested in confusion about the analytical status of prestige structures. At times Ortner and Whitehead refer to prestige as a "sphere of relations," at other times as a "set of structures" on the same level as political structures, and at still other times as "a dimension of social relations" of all kinds of structures, including political structures (1981: 10, 12–13). They also speak of "prestige situations" (1981: 13). For the most part, however, they use the term "prestige structures": "The sets of prestige positions or levels that result from a particular line of social evaluation, the mechanisms by which groups arrive at given levels or positions, and the overall conditions of reproduction of the system of statuses, we will designate as a 'prestige structure'" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: 13). Confusion about the status of prestige structures, moreover, leads to a tautological proposition about their relation to gender systems. Ortner and Whitehead contend on the one hand that the "social organization of prestige is the domain of social structure that most directly affects cultural notions of gender and sexuality," on the other, that "a gender system is first and foremost a prestige structure itself" (1981: 16).

Much of the confusion can be attributed to equating the dominant ideology with men's point of view. Even in those hypothetical cases where men as a whole are socially dominant over women as a whole and share the same values, beliefs, and goals, it seems a mistake to construe their perspective as more encompassing of the larger cultural system than women's perspective. For, like women's

views, men's views are constrained and conditioned by the particular forms of their relations with others. The men and women in a particular society may construe women's ideas and experience as more restricted than that of men (see, for example, Yanagisako this volume), and this may be reflected in the appearance that men have certain kinds of knowledge that women do not. But, this appearance does not justify the analytical incorporation of women's views in a supposedly more inclusive male ideology. Our task, rather, should be to make apparent the social and cultural processes that create such appearances.

In the end, the concept of "male prestige system" tends to replicate the problems inherent in the domestic/public dichotomy. Because it too rests on the notion of an encompassing male sphere and an encompassed female one, it assumes that "domestic life" is "insulated from the wider social sphere" (although its degree of insulation may vary) and that "domestic life" is concerned with "gender relations" and "child socialization." Thus, for example, in discussing Marshall Sahlins's (1981) analysis of systemic change in post-contact Hawaii, Ortner writes, "To the degree that domestic life is insulated from the wider social sphere . . . , important practices—of gender relations and child socialization—remain relatively untouched, and the transmission of novel meanings, values, and categorical relations to succeeding generations may be hindered. At the very least, what is transmitted will be significantly—and conservatively—modified" (1984: 156–57).

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) notion of "embodiment" offers a useful framework to counter the notion of conservative domestic spheres, detached from the public world of struggle and change. Domestic life, for Bourdieu, is not insulated from the wider social sphere. Rather, he argues that both gender relations and child socialization take place in a socially structured world. He writes that, for the child, "the awakening of consciousness of sexual identity and the incorporation of the dispositions associated with a determinate social definition of the social functions incumbent on men and women come hand in hand with the adoption of a socially defined vision of the sexual division of labor" (1977: 93).

Bourdieu's framework thus suggests that gender relations and child socialization—far from being insulated from changes in "meanings, values, and categorical relations"—are implicated in those changes. Indeed, the same point is suggested by Sahlins's

analysis of change in Hawaii that Ortner discusses, for Sahlins describes how the struggle over novel meanings of hierarchy was simultaneously a struggle over chiefship and gender relations. For Hawaiians, understandings of the chief/commoner relation and the husband/wife relation were implicated in each other and changed together. Similarly, Yanagisako's essay in this collection shows how Japanese Americans' conceptions of the domains of husbands and wives changed along with their institutional model of the relations between family and society.

The reemergence of a form of the domestic/public dichotomy in the concept of "male prestige systems" brings us full circle and poses, in a particularly dramatic way, the question of why we keep reinventing this dichotomy or transformations of it, such as reproduction/production. If, as we have argued, these oppositions assume the difference we should be trying to explain, why do we find them so compelling? Why do they seem, as Rosaldo (1980) claimed even when she argued against using domestic/public as an analytic device, so "telling"?

The answer, we suggest, lies in our own cultural conception of gender and its assumption of a natural difference between women and men. To arrive at an understanding of that conception, however, requires that we first review some recent insights in kinship studies. As we will demonstrate, there are striking similarities between muddles in kinship studies and those that we have just discussed in gender studies. Kinship and gender, moreover, are held together by more than a common set of methodological and conceptual problems. They constitute, by our very definition of them, a single topic of study.

The Mutual Constitution of Gender and Kinship

Both "gender" and "kinship" studies have been concerned with understanding the rights and duties that order relations between people defined by difference. Both begin by taking "difference" for granted and treating it as a presocial fact. Although social constructions are built on it, the difference itself is not viewed as a social construction. The fundamental units of gender—males and females—and the fundamental units of kinship—the genealogical grid—are both viewed as existing outside of and beyond culture. In this section, we consider David M. Schneider's critique of the biological

model that pervades and constrains kinship studies in order to suggest a parallel critique of gender studies.

Kinship and the Biological "Facts" of Sexual Reproduction

Among kinship theorists, Schneider (1964, 1968, 1972, 1984) has been the most consistent in refusing to take for granted what others have, namely, that the fundamental units of kinship are everywhere genealogical relationships. In his cultural analysis of American kinship (1968), Schneider first demonstrated that our particular folk conceptions of kinship lie behind our assumption of the universality of the genealogical grid. By explicating the symbolic system through which Americans construct genealogical relationships, Schneider denaturalized kinship and displayed its cultural foundations.

Most recently, in his 1984 critical review of the history of kinship studies, Schneider argues that, for anthropologists, kinship has always been rooted in biology because, by our own definition, it is about relationships based in sexual reproduction. When we undertake studies of kinship in other societies, we feel compelled to start from some common place, and that place has always been sexual reproduction. We do not ask what relationships are involved in the reproduction of humans in particular societies. Instead, we assume that the primary reproductive relationship in all societies is the relationship between a man and a woman characterized by sexual intercourse and its physiological consequences of pregnancy and parturition. The only time we bother to ask questions about reproduction is when we discover that the natives do not draw the same connections we do between these events, as in the case of the Trobriand Islanders, or when we discover that the natives permit marriages between people with the same genital equipment, as among the Nuer or Lovedu. In other words, we assume that of all the activities in which people participate, the ones that create human offspring are heterosexual intercourse, pregnancy, and parturition. Together these constitute the biological process upon which we presume culture builds such social relationships as marriage, filiation, and coparenthood.

The one major modification in kinship studies since the middle of the nineteenth century, according to Schneider, was the shift from an emphasis on the social *recognition* of the biological bonds arising out of the process of procreation to an emphasis on the so-

ciocultural *characteristics* of the relations mapped onto those bonds (Schneider 1984: 54). Since this shift, kinship theorists have been adamant that they view marriage, parenthood, and all other kinship relationships as social relationships and not biological ones. Schneider argues convincingly, however, that for all the claims these writers make that they are speaking of social paters and social maters and not genitors and genitrexes, they have biological parenthood in mind all the time. This point is perhaps no more clearly illustrated than in the following statement by Fortes, quoted by Schneider: "The *facts* of sex, procreation, and the rearing of offspring constitute only the universal raw material of kinship systems" (Fortes 1949: 345, italics ours). For Fortes, as for the other kinship theorists reviewed by Schneider, these *facts* are unambiguously construed as *natural* ones.

Although it is apparent that heterosexual intercourse, pregnancy, and parturition are involved in human reproduction, it is also apparent that producing humans entails more than this. M. Bridget O'Laughlin (1977) put it very succinctly when she wrote, "Human reproduction is never simply a matter of conception and birth." There is a wide range of activities in which people participate besides heterosexual intercourse and parturition that contribute to the birth of viable babies and to their development into adults. These activities, in turn, involve and are organized by a number of relationships other than those of parenthood and marriage. Given the wide range of human activities and relationships that can be viewed as contributing to the production of human beings, why do we focus on only a few of them as the universal basis of kinship? Why do we construe these few activities and relationships as natural facts, rather than investigating the ways in which they are, like all social facts, culturally constructed? The answer Schneider has proposed is that our theory of kinship is simultaneously a folk theory of biological reproduction.

Gender and the Biological "Facts" of Sexual Reproduction

Schneider's insight that kinship is by definition about sexual procreation leads us to realize that assumptions about gender lie at the core of kinship studies. Moreover, not only are ideas about gender central to analyses of kinship, but ideas about kinship are central to analyses of gender. Because both gender and kinship have been defined as topics of study by our conception of the same thing,

namely, sexual procreation, we cannot think about one without thinking about the other. In short, these two fields of studies are mutually constituted.

Gender assumptions pervade notions about the *facts* of sexual reproduction commonplace in the kinship literature. Much of what is written about atoms of kinship (Lévi-Strauss 1949), the axiom of prescriptive altruism (Fortes 1958; Fortes 1969), the universality of the family (Fox 1967), and the centrality of the mother-child bond (Goodenough 1970) is rooted in assumptions about the natural characteristics of women and men and their natural roles in sexual procreation. The standard units of our genealogies, after all, are circles and triangles about which we assume a number of things. Above all, we take for granted that they represent two naturally different categories of people and that the natural difference between them is the basis of human reproduction and, therefore, kinship. Harold Scheffler's (1974: 749) statement that "the foundation of any kinship system consists in the folk-cultural theory designed to account for the fact that women give birth to children" reveals that, for him, kinship is everywhere about the same biological fact. Although he recognizes that there are a variety of ways in which this "fact" may be accounted for in different societies, Scheffler, like most kinship theorists, assumes certain social consequences follow necessarily from it, including that biological motherhood is everywhere the core of the social relationship of motherhood (Scheffler 1970).*

Likewise, the literature on gender is sensitive to the many ways in which pregnancy and childbirth are conceptualized and valued in different societies and to the different ways in which the activities surrounding them can be socially organized. But, the conviction that the biological *difference* in the roles of women and men in sexual reproduction lies at the core of the cultural organization of gender persists in comparative analyses. As we argued in the previous section, the analytical oppositions of domestic/public, nature/culture, and reproduction/production all begin with this as-

*It is noteworthy that motherhood is the locus of many assumptions in feminist writing as well as in the nonfeminist kinship literature. However, in the feminist literature, the emphasis is more on the ways in which mothering constrains and structures women's lives and psyches (for example, Chodorow 1979), whereas in the nonfeminist kinship literature (for example, Fortes 1969; Goodenough 1970; Scheffler 1974), the emphasis is on the positive affect and bond that maternal nurturance creates in domestic relationships.

sumption of difference. Like kinship theorists, moreover, analysts of gender have assumed that specific social consequences necessarily follow from this difference between men and women. For example, the assumption that women *bear* the greater burden and responsibility for human reproduction pervades gender studies, in particular those works employing a reproduction/production distinction. Yet, this notion often appears to be more a metaphorical extension of our emphasis on the fact that women *bear* children than a conclusion based on systematic comparison of the contribution of men and women to human reproduction. In other words, the fact that women bear children and men do not is interpreted as creating a universal relation of human reproduction. Accordingly, we have been much slower to question the purported universals of the reproductive relations of men and women than we have been to question the purported universals of their productive relations. For example, as we have shown, in the literature on women and capitalist development, women's natural burden in reproduction is viewed as constraining their role in production, rather than seen as itself shaped by historical changes in the organization of production.

The centrality of sexual reproduction in the definition of gender is reflected in the distinction between sex and gender that has become a convention in much of the feminist literature. Judith Shapiro summarizes the distinction between the terms as follows:

[T]hey serve a 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*. . . . [G]ender . . . designates a set of categories to which we can give the same label crosslinguistically, 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" (1981: 449, italics ours).

The attempt to separate the study of gender categories from the biological facts to which they are seen to be universally connected mirrors the attempt of kinship theorists reviewed by Schneider (1984) to separate the study of kinship from the same biological facts. Like the latter attempt, this one seems doomed to fail, be-

cause it too starts from a definition of its subject matter that is rooted in those biological facts. It is impossible, of course, to know what gender or kinship would mean if they are to be entirely disconnected from sex and biological reproduction. We have no choice but to begin our investigations of others with our own concepts. But, we can unpack the cultural assumptions embodied in them, which limit our capacity to understand social systems informed by other cultural assumptions.

Although gender and kinship studies start from what are construed as the same biological facts of sexual reproduction, they might appear to be headed in different analytical directions: kinship to the social character of genealogical relations and gender to the social character of male-female relations (and even to male-male relations and female-female relations). However, because both build their explanations of the social rights and duties and the relations of equality and inequality among people on these presumably natural characteristics, both retain the legacy of their beginnings in notions about *the same natural differences* between people. Consequently, what have been conceptualized as two discrete, if interconnected, fields of study constitute a single field.

Our realization of the unitary constitution of gender and kinship as topics of study should make us wary of treating them as distinct analytical problems. As Schneider (1984: 175) points out, part of the "conventional wisdom of kinship" has been the idea that kinship forms a system that can be treated as a distinct institution or domain. Like "economics," "politics," and "religion," kinship has been posited as one of the fundamental building blocks of society by anthropologists (Schneider 1984: 181).^{*} At the same time, neither should we assume that in all societies kinship creates gender or that gender creates kinship. Although the two may be mutually constituted as topics of study by *our* society, this does not mean they are linked in the same way in all societies. Instead, as we shall suggest below, we should seek rather than assume knowledge of the socially significant domains of relations in any particular society and what constitutes them. Having rejected the notion that

^{*}Schneider attributes this to the mid-nineteenth-century attempt by anthropologists to establish the history or development of civilization as this was embodied in European culture, and to the notion that development proceeded from the simple to the complex, from the undifferentiated to the differentiated. To the extent that kinship, economics, politics, and religion were undifferentiated, a society was "primitive," "simple," or "simpler."

there are presocial, universal domains of social relations, such as a domestic domain and a public domain, a kinship domain and a political domain, we must ask what symbolic and social processes make these domains appear self-evident, and perhaps even "natural," fields of activity in any society (see Comaroff this volume).

Transcending Dichotomies: A Focus on Social Wholes

Understanding the folk model of human reproduction underlying the analytical categories and dichotomies—explicit and implicit—that have dominated both gender and kinship studies is the first step toward transcending them. The next step is to move beyond the dichotomies by focusing on social wholes. Instead of asking how the categories of "male" and "female" are endowed with culturally specific characters, thus taking the difference between them for granted, we need to ask how particular societies define difference. Instead of asking how rights and obligations are mapped onto kinship bonds, thus assuming the genealogical grid, we need to ask how specific societies recognize claims and allocate responsibilities. Our ability to understand social wholes, however, is limited by another analytic concept—that of "egalitarian society"—which, as used by many feminists and Marxists, once again bears the legacy of our folk notion of difference.

Questioning the Concept of "Egalitarian Society"

Anthropologists have used the concept of "egalitarian society" in two, somewhat contradictory, ways. Morton Fried coined the term to denote a particular form of organizing inequality. Given his assumption that "equality is a social impossibility" (1967: 26), he defines an "egalitarian society" as "one in which there are as many positions of prestige in any given age-sex grade as there are persons capable of filling them" (1967: 33). Not all people achieve valued positions. Fried, for example, writes that men in such societies "display a considerable drive to achieve parity, or at least to establish a status that announces 'don't fool with me'" (1967: 79). He thus reveals that some men fail, whereas women and youths never have a chance to "achieve parity." Given that Fried focuses on the organization of inequality, his usage of the term "egalitarian society" is misleading.

In contrast to Fried, many Marxist and feminist scholars use the

concept of "egalitarian society" to denote societies in which people are indeed "equal" in the sense that they do not exhibit the class and gender inequalities characteristic of ancient societies and modern capitalism. These scholars define egalitarian societies less in terms of features they possess than in terms of features they lack. In arguing that the gender and class inequalities familiar to us today and from accounts of the past are the product of specific historical processes, these scholars suggest, usually by default, that the organization of gender and production in nonclass societies is not produced by history. Consequently, the social categories in nonclass societies are seen as reflecting "natural" human propensities, given particular environmental conditions (Jaggar 1983: 70).

For example, Gough, in writing on "The Origin of the Family," states that "marriage and sexual restrictions are practical arrangements among hunters designed mainly to serve economic and survival needs. In these societies, some kind of rather stable pairing best accomplishes the division of labor and cooperation of men and women and the care of children" (1975: 68). In this passage, Gough clearly assumes the existence of a "natural" difference between females and males that must be accommodated through a particular form of organization—through marriage and sexual restrictions—for human reproduction to be successfully accomplished. When writing about complex, inegalitarian societies, however, she observes that marriage and sexual restrictions reflect ruling class efforts to perpetuate class dominance. In sum, for Gough, the gap between nonclass and class societies is sufficiently wide to justify the use of two distinct theories of society: in the case of the former, an ecological-functionalist theory that portrays social restrictions as "practical arrangements" promoting the collective good among naturally different kinds of people, and in the case of the latter, a Marxist-functionalist theory that portrays social restrictions as hegemonic arrangements promoting the self-interest of the dominant group among socially constructed categories of people.

Feminists arguing against the universality of sexual asymmetry are presently the most active proponents of the concept of egalitarian society. Not only do they believe that such societies once existed, but they consider the concept our most effective rhetorical strategy for establishing that biology is not destiny (Sacks 1976; Sacks 1979; Leacock 1978; Schlegel 1977; Caulfield 1981). They argue that assertions of universal sexual asymmetry—such as those

by Rosaldo (1974), Ortner (1974), and Fried (1975)—legitimize a search for biological causes. Consequently, to posit the existence of sexually egalitarian societies is to obviate such a search before it begins.

Eleanor Leacock, in an important article positing the existence of sexually egalitarian societies (1978), argues that Western observers have failed to recognize such societies because their ability to understand egalitarian socioeconomic relations is hindered by concepts derived from the hierarchical structure of capitalism: "The tendency to attribute to band societies the relations of power and property characteristic of our own obscures the qualitatively different relations that obtained when ties of economic dependency linked the individual directly with the group as a whole, when public and private spheres were not dichotomized, and when decisions were made by and large by those who would be carrying them out" (1978: 247). In particular, Leacock criticizes our tendency to interpret a sexual division of labor as hierarchical—our inability to imagine that men and women who do different things might be "separate but equal" (1978: 248).

In seeking to counter anthropological accounts portraying women in band societies as subordinate to men, Leacock suggests that men and women were equally "autonomous." Men and women may have engaged in different activities, but women "held decision making power over their own lives and activities to the same extent that men did over theirs" (1978: 247). Leacock writes that she prefers "the term 'autonomy' to 'equality,' for equality connotes rights and opportunity specific to class society and confuses similarity with equity" (1978: 247).

Substituting "autonomy" for "equality," however, does not free Leacock from the problems inherent in using concepts based on the hierarchical structure of our own society. "Autonomy," as used in our cultural system, is not a neutral term. As Sandra Wallman observes, in Western social science, "behavioral differences between men and women have generally been attributed *either* to natural, and therefore, essential differences in biology, physiology, genetics *or* to cultural, and therefore non-essential impositions, the fortuitous demands and/or accidents of a social system and the dialectics of history and/or the human mind" (1978: 21, italics hers). In other words, our folk system posits that behavioral differences not explained by culture must be due to nature, and vice versa. As a re-

sult, by claiming a freedom from outside constraints, "autonomy" inevitably invokes notions of biological destiny.

Leacock surely did not intend to portray women in band societies as acting out their biological natures when they engaged in women's work. But by failing to treat "men" and "women" as cultural constructs and in accepting the difference in their activities, Leacock suggests this position by default (see Strathern 1978; Atkinson 1982). Leacock's notion of "autonomy" can be read in two ways, but neither avoids the implication of biological destiny. If we interpret her statement that women "held decision making power over their own lives and activities" to mean that women could decide what they wanted to do, then we are faced with the question of why women all decided to do women's tasks rather than doing what men did. Why did women not decide, like good Marxists, "to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, [and] criticize after dinner" (Marx and Engels 1970: 53)? The obvious answer, given Leacock's failure to investigate the social and cultural factors shaping women's decisions, is that women "naturally" wanted to do women's tasks, just as men "naturally" wanted to do men's tasks. If we adopt an alternative reading of Leacock's statement and conclude that women "held decision making power over their own lives and activities" *only* "to the same extent that men did over theirs," we are left with the question of what it means to "have decision making power" over one's own life. In this reading, women and men appear equally constrained to take up only sex-appropriate tasks. But the social and symbolic practices through which they are constrained are not discussed, suggesting, again by default, a "natural" division of labor by sex.

In summary, however useful the concept of "egalitarian society" may be for denaturalizing gender in class societies, it raises many of the problems we encountered in our discussion of the analytic dichotomies of domestic/public, nature/culture, and reproduction/production. By positing a past Eden in which women and men were "autonomous," we assume precultural, natural differences as the bases for the sexual division of labor.

Analyzing Social Wholes: Meanings, Models, and History

Given our tendency to reinvent the analytic dichotomies that limit our ability to understand gender in our own and other soci-

eties, we need an explicit strategy for transcending them. The one we propose in this final section of the paper rests on the premise that there are no "facts," biological or material, that have social consequences and cultural meanings in and of themselves. Sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and parturition are cultural facts, whose form, consequences, and meanings are socially constructed in any society, as are mothering, fathering, judging, ruling, and talking with the gods. Similarly, there are no material "facts" that can be treated as precultural givens. The consequences and meanings of force are socially constructed, as are those of the means of production or the resources upon which people depend for their living.

Just as we reject analytic dichotomies, so we reject analytic domains. We do not assume the existence of a gender system based on natural differences in sexual reproduction, a kinship system based on the genealogical grid, a polity based on force, or an economy based on the production and distribution of needed resources. Rather than take for granted that societies are constituted of functionally based institutional domains, we propose to investigate the social and symbolic processes by which human actions within particular social worlds come to have consequences and meanings, including their apparent organization into seemingly "natural" social domains.

We begin with the premise that social systems are, by definition, systems of inequality. This premise has three immediate advantages. First, it conforms to common usage. By most definitions, a society is a system of social relationships and values. Values entail evaluation. Consequently, a society is a system of social relationships in which all things and actions are not equal. As Ralf Dahrendorf (1968) notes, values inevitably create inequalities by ensuring rewards for those who live up to valued ideals and punishments for those who, for one reason or another, fail to do so. Every society has a "prestige structure," as Ortner and Whitehead (1981) presume. A system of values, however, is not "male," and in analyzing any particular society, we must ask why people appear to hold the values they do.

Second, the premise that all societies are systems of inequality forces us to separate the frequently confused concepts of equality (the state of being equal) and justice (moral rightness). By presuming that all societies are systems of inequality, we are forced to sep-

arate the study of our own and other people's cultural systems of evaluation from considerations of whether or not such systems meet our standards of honor and fairness.

Finally, the premise that all societies are systems of inequality frees us from having to imagine a world without socially created inequities. We therefore avoid having to assume social consequences for "natural" differences. If we assume that all societies are systems of inequality, then we, as social scientists, are forced to explain not the existence of inequality itself but rather why it takes the qualitatively different forms it does.

In defining "egalitarian society" out of existence, however, we do not propose a return to the hypothesis of women's universal subordination. Rather, the premise that all societies are systems of inequality forces us to specify what we mean by inequality in each particular case. Instead of asking how "natural" differences acquire cultural meanings and social consequences (a strategy that dooms us to reinventing our analytic dichotomies), a presumption of inequality forces us to ask why some attributes and characteristics of people are culturally recognized and differentially evaluated when others are not. This requires us to begin any analysis by asking, What are a society's cultural values? And what social processes organize the distribution of prestige, power, and privilege? We may find that in some societies neither cultural values nor social processes discriminate between the sexes (that is, a nongendered system of inequality). But this conclusion must follow from an analysis of how inequality is organized.

Given our premise that social systems are systems of inequality, we propose an analytical program with three facets. These facets are arranged not in order of theoretical importance but in the sequence we feel they should be employed in any particular analysis. Some researchers, depending on the particular question or type of society that is the topic of study, may find another sequence preferable or may choose to focus on one facet more than the others. But, we suggest, no attempt to analyze social wholes can proceed very far without employing all three.

The Cultural Analysis of Meaning. The first facet of our program entails an analysis of cultural systems of meanings. Specifically, we must begin by explicating the cultural meanings people realize through their practice of social relationships. Rather than assume

that the fundamental units of gender and kinship in every society are defined by the difference between males and females in sexual reproduction, we ask what are the socially meaningful categories people employ and encounter in specific social contexts and what symbols and meanings underlie them. Just as Schneider (1968) questioned, rather than took for granted, the meanings of blood, love, and sexual intercourse in American kinship and their influence on the construction of categories of relatives, so we have to question the meanings of genes, love, sexual intercourse, power, independence, and whatever else plays into the symbolic construction of categories of people in any particular society. This analytical stance toward gender is well summarized in the following statement by Ortner and Whitehead: "Gender, sexuality, and reproduction are treated as *symbols*, invested with meaning by the society in question, as all symbols are. The approach to the problem of sex and gender is thus a matter of symbolic analysis and interpretation, a matter of relating such symbols and meanings to other cultural symbols and meanings on the one hand, and to the forms of social life and experience on the other" (1981: 1-2). By attending to the public discourses through which people describe, interpret, evaluate, make claims about, and attempt to influence relationships and events, we can extract the relatively stable symbols and meanings people employ in everyday life.

These symbols and meanings, as will be stressed in the next section on systemic models of social inequality, are always evaluative. As such, they encode particular distributions of prestige, power, and privilege. However, because they are realized through social practice, they are not static. As will become apparent when we discuss the importance of historical analysis, we do not assume cultural systems of meaning to be timeless, self-perpetuating structures of "tradition." Yet, even when the meanings of core symbols are changing, we can tease apart their different meanings in particular contexts and, thereby, better understand the symbolic processes involved in social change (Yanagisako 1985; Yanagisako this volume).

Once we have investigated the various ways in which difference is conceptualized in other societies—including whether and how sex and reproduction play into the construction of differences that make a difference—we can return to examine the biological model that defines gender in our own society. In other words, just as our

questioning of the domestic/public dichotomy as the structural basis for relations between men and women in other societies has encouraged us to question its analytical usefulness for our own society (Yanagisako this volume), so we can ask what a conception of gender as rooted in biological difference does and does not explain about relations between men and women in our society. Having recognized our model of biological difference as a particular cultural mode of thinking about relations between people, we should be able to question the "biological facts" of sex themselves. We expect that our questioning of the presumably biological core of gender will eventually lead to the rejection of any dichotomy between sex and gender as biological and cultural facts and will open up the way for an analysis of the symbolic and social processes by which both are constructed in relation to each other.

The cultural analysis of meaning, however, cannot be isolated from the analysis of patterns of action. We do not view systems of meaning as ideational determinants of social organization or as solutions to universal problems of meaning and order. Rather, we conceptualize the interrelated, but not necessarily consistent, meanings of social events and relationships as both shaping and being shaped by practice. Our refusal to dichotomize material relationships and meanings or to grant one or the other analytic priority derives from our conceptualization of practice and ideas as aspects of a single process.

Systemic Models of Inequality. Ideas and actions are aspects of a single dialectical process, and we understand this process by focusing on how inequality is organized. Because we assume that cultural conceptions are voiced in contexts in which, among other things, people make claims, provide explanations, try to influence action, and celebrate the qualities they use when creating relationships, we understand cultural conceptions by focusing on what claims may be made, what things explained, what actions influenced, and what relationships forged. In order to understand what people talk about, we must ask what people may want or fear. And so we must understand how inequality is organized in any particular society.

The second facet of our analytical strategy thus requires the construction of systemic models of inequality. These models are of a particular type. Following Bourdieu (1977), we analyze a social sys-

tem not by positing an unseen, timeless structure but rather by asking how ordinary people, pursuing their own subjective ends, realize the structures of inequality that constrain their possibilities. This is why the first facet of our strategy requires an analysis of the commonsense meanings available to people for monitoring and interpreting their own and others' actions. But this analysis of meaning must be followed by an analysis of the structures that people realize through their actions. Because we understand the commonsense meanings available to people not by positing an unseen, timeless culture but rather by exploring how people's understandings of the world are shaped by their structured experiences, we must move back and forth between an analysis of how structures shape people's experience and an analysis of how people, through their actions, realize structures.

Although a systemic model of inequality may be constructed for any society, developing a typology of models aids in the analysis of particular cases. In the end, as we will discuss in the next section, each society must be analyzed in its own, historically specific terms, but a set of ideal typic models helps us to see connections we might otherwise miss. All attempts to understand other cultures are, by their nature, comparative. It is impossible to describe a particular, unique way of life without explicitly or implicitly comparing it to another—usually the analyst's own society or the society of the language the analyst is using. Since comparison is inevitable, it seems more productive to have a set of models available for thinking about similarities and contrasts than to have but ourselves as a single implicit or explicit standard of comparison.

In suggesting that we need to develop several ideal typic models, we echo those feminists who similarly advocate developing a typology of societies to aid in the analysis of particular cases (see Etienne and Leacock 1980). We may define social systems as systems of inequality, but like feminists who posit the existence of "egalitarian societies," we recognize that our ability to understand social relations in other societies is hindered by our "tendency to attribute to [others] the relations of power and property characteristic of our own" (Leacock 1978: 247), even as our hierarchical division of labor makes it difficult for us to imagine that men and women who do different things might nevertheless be "separate but equal" (Sacks 1976). We thus agree with feminists who posit

the existence of "egalitarian societies" that we need models capable of distinguishing among qualitatively different forms of social hierarchy.

In seeking to develop such models, however, we do not view either technology or socially organized access to productive resources as determining traits (see Collier and Rosaldo 1981: 318; Collier this volume; Collier n.d.). Given our assumption that no biological or material "fact" has social consequences in and of itself, we cannot begin by assuming the determining character of either the forces or relations of production. We therefore do not classify societies according to technologies—such as foraging, horticulture, agriculture, pastoralism, and industry (for example, Martin and Voorhies 1975)—or according to social relations governing access to resources—such as egalitarian, ranked, and stratified (Etienne and Leacock 1980) or communal, corporate kin, and class (Sacks 1979).

An example of the kind of model of inequality we are proposing is Jane Collier and Michelle Rosaldo's ideal typic model of "brideservice" societies (1981). The classification scheme employed in this essay and others (Collier 1984; Collier this volume; Collier n.d.) uses marriage transaction terms—brideservice, equal or standard bridewealth, and unequal or variable bridewealth—as labels for systemic models, treating marriage transactions not as determinants of social organization or ideas but rather as moments when practice and meaning are negotiated together. Marriage negotiations are moments of "systemic reproduction" (see Comaroff this volume) in those societies in which "kinship" appears to organize people's rights and obligations relative to others. Societies with different bases of organization will have different moments of "systemic reproduction."

Just as we do not posit determining traits, so the kind of understanding we seek is not linear. Rather, the type of model we propose traces complex relationships between aspects of what—using conventional analytical categories—we might call gender, kinship, economy, polity, and religion. The principal virtue of such models is that they provide insights into the cultural meanings and social consequences of actions, events, and people's attributes by tracing the processes by which these elements are realized. Such systemic models privilege no domains over others. Unlike Ortner and Whitehead, who advocate a focus on "male prestige-oriented ac-

tion" as the key to understanding gender relations in any society (1981: 20), we suggest that "prestige systems" also need explanation. When men, for example, talk as if male prestige is generated through activities that do not involve relations with women, such as hunting and warfare, we ask why men make such statements and what social processes make them appear reasonable. A "brideservice" model suggests that—at least in societies of foragers and hunter-horticulturalists—people celebrate "Man the Hunter" not because male prestige is actually based on hunting, but rather because hunting is a principal idiom in which men talk about their claims to the wives whose daily services allow them to enjoy the freedom of never having to ask anyone for anything (Collier and Rosaldo 1981).

Because systemic models specify the contexts in which people articulate particular concerns, such models can help us to understand the apparently inconsistent meanings we discover through cultural analysis. In their analysis of "brideservice societies," for example, Collier and Rosaldo (1981) suggest why male violence is feared even as it is celebrated, why women who contribute as much or more than men to the diet do not emphasize their economic contribution but rather stress their sexuality, why bachelors are lazy hunters when sex is portrayed as the hunter's reward, and why notions of direct-exchange marriage coexist with the belief that men earn their wives through feats of prowess. Systemic models, by allowing us to understand such apparent inconsistencies, provide the analytic tools necessary for overcoming our own cultural bias toward consistency. Once we understand that force is both feared and celebrated, for example, then we are no longer tempted to ignore one aspect or choose which one is more empirically valid.

Although models provide conceptual tools for analyzing social and cultural systems, they, like the cultural analysis of meaning, are but one facet of our strategy. If our aim is to understand real people, model building can never be an end in itself. Because models are necessarily abstract, to the degree that we succeed in building a systemic model, we cease to illuminate the particularities of any given historical society. It is not, as has often been claimed, that systemic models of the sort we are proposing are inherently static. Because these models rest on the assumption that social structures are realized and cultural conceptions voiced by people pursuing their own subjective ends in social worlds of in-

equality, competition, and conflict, the potential for change is inherent in every action. Systemic models appear static, however, because they are designed to answer the unstated question of why societies appear to change as little as they do given the constant possibility of change. Models thus tend to reveal how those in power use their power to preserve their positions of privilege.

Historical Analysis. The third facet of our analytical strategy is motivated by our belief that change is possible in all social systems, regardless of their particular configuration of inequality. We thus need an explicit strategy to counterbalance the emphasis on social reproduction in our systemic models, so that we can see how social systems change and, at the same time, better understand the processes that enable them to remain relatively stable over time. A historical analysis that interprets current ideas and practices within the context of the unfolding sequence of action and meaning that has led to them provides this balance. Such an analysis broadens the temporal range of our analysis of social wholes by asking how their connection with the past constrains and shapes their dynamics in the present, whether that connection is one of relative continuity or of radical disjunction. In other words, whereas historical analysis is of critical importance for understanding societies and communities that are undergoing dramatic transformations (for example, Sahlin 1981; Yanagisako 1985; Collier 1986), it is of no less importance for understanding societies characterized by seeming social and cultural continuity (R. Rosaldo 1980). For, given that change is inherent in social action, the reproduction of social systems requires no less explanation than does their transformation.

The kind of historical approach we are proposing will enrich our cultural analysis of meaning by broadening the range of symbols, meanings, and practices to which we relate concepts of value and difference. Our proposal to link historical analysis with symbolic analysis rests on the premise that we cannot comprehend present discourse and action without understanding their relation to past discourse and action (Yanagisako 1985). The relevant context of specific cultural elements, such as "marriage," "mother," "blood," or "semen," is not limited to current practices and meanings, but includes past practices and their symbolic meanings. For example, the meanings of "equality," "duty," and "love" in the conjugal relationship may be shaped by the past character of conjugal rela-

tionships as well as their present ones and by the way in which past and present are symbolically linked (Yanagisako this volume). Likewise, the meaning of "agnatic" ties at any one period may be shaped by the uses to which such ties were previously put (Comaroff this volume). All these analyses argue that we must know the dialectical, historical processes through which practices and meanings have unfolded if we are to understand how they operate in the present.

Similarly, grounding our analysis of social wholes and fashioning our systemic models of inequality within particular historical sequences will enable us to see how the dynamics of past actions and ideas have created structures in the present. Relationships suggested by our systemic models can be tested in a dynamic context and, if necessary, modified or refined. By taking such a historical perspective on the constitution of social wholes, we avoid assuming that present systems of inequality are the timeless products of identical pasts; instead, we question whether and how these systems developed out of dissimilar pasts (Lindenbaum this volume; Smith this volume). We can see how aspects of ideas and practices, which in our systemic models seem to reinforce and reproduce each other, also undermine and destabilize each other.

A historical perspective also highlights the interaction of ideas and practices as dialectical, ongoing processes and so avoids the teleological bent of those models that seek a single determinant, whether material or ideational, for social reproduction. A good example of how historical analysis can help us transcend the dichotomization of ideas and practices can be seen in the anthropological literature on the sexual division of labor. As Jane Guyer (1980) notes, much of this literature has tended to emphasize either the material, technological determinants of the sexual division of labor or its cultural, ideational determinants. Yet, she points out, "the division of labor is, like all fundamental institutions, multifaceted. Within any particular society, it is an integral part of the ideological system, economic organization, daily family life, and often the political structure as well. . . . In any one case, all these dimensions reinforce each other, so that the current structure seems both heavily overdetermined and ultimately mysterious since it is difficult to assign weight to any one factor over another" (1980: 356).

Guyer's comparative analysis of historical developments in the sexual division of labor and organization of production in two Af-

rican societies offers a useful alternative to unidimensional views of the division of labor. She shows how the development of cocoa as a cash crop in two societies initially characterized by different sexual divisions of labor and organizations of production brought about different changes in these and other aspects of social organization.

Finally, to return to the beginning of this essay, historical analysis can help us to transcend the analytical dichotomies and domains that we have argued have plagued gender and kinship studies. Historical studies (see Comaroff, Lindenbaum, Maher, Rapp, Smith, and Yanagisako this volume) reveal how seemingly universal, timeless domains of social structure are created and transformed in particular times and places.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, we suggested that feminism's next contribution to the study of gender and kinship should be to question the difference between women and men. We do not doubt that men and women are different, just as individuals differ, generations differ, races differ, and so forth. Rather, we question whether the particular biological difference in reproductive function that our culture defines as the basis of difference between males and females, and so treats as the basis of their relationship, is used by other societies to constitute the cultural categories of male and female.

Past feminist questions have led to the opening up of new areas for investigation, even as such investigations have raised new problems and questions. By doubting the common assumption that sex and age are "natural" bases for the differential allocation of social rights and duties, feminist scholars paved the way for studies of the social processes that granted men prestige and authority over women and children. Yet feminists' attempts to provide social explanations for perceived universal sexual asymmetry used the analytic dichotomies of domestic/public and nature/culture that themselves became problematic.

Doubts concerning the analytic utility and cultural universality of these dichotomies led, in turn, to studies of the social and cultural processes by which the categories of masculinity and femininity are constituted in particular times and places. Yet, as we have

suggested, some of these studies raised a new set of questions. Attempts to replace the inherently gendered dichotomies of domestic/public and nature/culture with the distinction between reproduction and production, and the positing of "male prestige systems," have revealed our tendency to rediscover gendered dichotomies. Similarly, attempts to argue that men and women have not everywhere and at all times been unequal have given rise to the concept of "egalitarian society," a concept that, if not complemented by a cultural analysis of personhood, implies, by default, a "natural" basis for sexual divisions of labor.

Now, we suggest, our problem of continually rediscovering gendered categories can be overcome by calling into question the universality of our cultural assumptions about the difference between males and females. Both gender and kinship studies, we suggest, have foundered on the unquestioned assumption that the biologically given difference in the roles of men and women in sexual reproduction lies at the core of the cultural organization of gender, even as it constitutes the genealogical grid at the core of kinship studies. Only by calling this assumption into question can we begin to ask how other cultures might understand the difference between women and men, and simultaneously make possible studies of how our own culture comes to focus on coitus and parturition as *the* moments constituting masculinity and femininity.

It is not enough to question the universality and analytic utility of our implicit assumptions about sex differences. Rather, we need specific strategies to help us overcome our tendency to reinvent gendered analytic dichotomies. In this essay, we have argued for the need to analyze social wholes and have proposed a three-faceted approach to this project: the explication of cultural meanings, the construction of models specifying the dialectical relationship between practice and ideas in the constitution of social inequalities, and the historical analysis of continuities and changes.

The commitment to analyzing social wholes is one we share with all the contributors to this volume. Not everyone might agree with our questioning of the difference between women and men, or with our three-faceted approach to analyzing social wholes, for we formulated both notions after the conference. Nevertheless, we believe that this volume provides a good illustration of the insights to be gained from a commitment to holistic analysis.

Finally, we have no illusions that the strategy we propose will re-

solve all the issues we have raised. We know that we, too, can never be free from the folk models of our own culture, and that in questioning some folk concepts we privilege others. We expect that the studies we hope to generate by questioning the difference between women and men will, in time, reveal their own problematic assumptions. These will generate new questions that will, in turn, give rise to new strategies and new solutions.

Contributors

Maurice Bloch
Jane Fishburne Collier
John L. Comaroff
Shirley Lindenbaum
Vanessa Maher
Rayna Rapp
Judith Shapiro
Raymond T. Smith
Marilyn Strathern
Harriet Whitehead
Sylvia Junko Yanagisako

Gender and Kinship
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EDITED BY

Jane Fishburne Collier and
Sylvia Junko Yanagisako



STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 1987

Stanford, California

Stanford University Press, Stanford, California
© 1987 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University
Printed in the United States of America
CIP data appear at the end of the book

TO THE MEMORY OF
MICHELLE ZIMBALIST ROSALDO