Boundaries, Negotiation, Consciousness: Reconceptualizing Gender Relations
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BOUNDARIES, NEGOTIATION, CONSCIOUSNESS: RECONCEPTUALIZING GENDER RELATIONS*

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This paper identifies and analyzes three constructs basic to the study of gender relations—boundaries, negotiation and domination, and consciousness. The concept of boundaries describes the complex structures—physical, social, ideological, and psychological—which establish differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, and among men. The reciprocal processes of negotiation and domination elucidate the ways in which women and men act to support and/or challenge the existing system of gender relations. While domination describes systems of control and coercion, negotiation addresses the ways women and men bargain for privileges and resources. Consciousness assumes various forms ranging from gender awareness to feminist/anti-feminist consciousness, and is conceived as a process which develops dialectically in the social relations of the sexes. We argue that this conceptual framework produces a more sensitive and complex set of analytical tools for understanding gender relations.

Over the last fifteen years, research on sex and gender has examined the role of women in the past and present, recovered neglected human experiences, and transformed social analysis. A key contribution of this work—one that directly confronts traditional interpretations of women—is that gender is a primary social category which cannot be subsumed under such analytical categories as class and caste. Conceptualizing gender, however, remains a problem. Questions of how gender systems operate, their cultural construction, and their relation to individual and social interactions often are implicit in the analysis of women's experience. As a result, calls for greater definitional and theoretical clarity have been issued (Gould and Kern-Daniels, 1977; Lopata and Thorne, 1978; Shapiro, 1982; Tresemer, 1975) and scholars in this field increasingly have asserted the need to understand gender as a system of social relations (Goffman, 1977; Kelly-Gadol, 1976; Rubin, 1975; Thorne, 1980).

This formulation of gender asserts that gender is defined by socially constructed relationships between women and men, among women, and among men in social groups. Gender is not a rigid or reified analytic category imposed on human experience, but a fluid one whose meaning emerges in specific social contexts as it is created and recreated through human actions. Analysis of gender

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1. Exceptions to this general pattern include Ehrenreich and English (1978), Hartmann (1976, 1981), and Kanter (1977).

2. Our analysis has been influenced by an interactionist approach (cf. Conrad and Schneider, 1980). Other researchers studying gender also have adopted elements of this orientation. See, for example, Henley (1977) and Thorne (1980). It is also plausible to consider the psychoanalytic studies of gender relations as being linked in part to this tradition (cf. Chodorow, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976). Moreover, there has been considerable work in the areas of class and race relations which utilizes elements of an interactionist orientation (cf. Genovese, 1972 and Thompson, 1963).
relations necessarily goes beyond comparisons of the status and power of the sexes, involving an examination of the dynamic, reciprocal, and interdependent interactions between and among women and men (Rosaldo, 1980). In these relationships—those, for example, which construct the sexual division of labor and the social organization of sexuality and reproduction—women and men constitute distinct social groups (Eisenstein, 1979; Thorne, 1980).

While the problems of conceptualization remain significant, scholars have identified and elaborated several major constructs central to an analysis of gender as a system of social relations: 1) separate spheres; 2) domination of women; and 3) sex-related consciousness. The first, separate spheres, has allowed scholars to examine the different material and ideological worlds in which women and men work, live, and think. The literature on domination explains the forms and processes of physical intimidation, economic exploitation, and ideological control to which women are subjected. Lastly, women's consciousness as well as feminist consciousness have been analyzed as rooted in women's distinctive experiences as a social category.

Our aim in this paper is to recast these basic constructs in several ways, by reconsidering gender relations in terms of boundaries, processes of negotiation as well as domination, and gender consciousness as an interactive and multidimensional process. The concept of boundaries describes the complex structures—physical, social, ideological, and psychological—which establish the differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, and among men, shaping and constraining the behavior and attitudes of each gender group. The reciprocal processes of negotiation and domination elucidate the ways in which women and men act to support and challenge the existing system of gender relations. Domination describes the systems of male control and coercion, while negotiation addresses the processes by which men and women bargain for privileges and resources. Each group has some assets which enable it to cooperate with or resist existing social arrangements, although clearly these resources and the consequent power are unequal. Finally, although women's consciousness is grounded conceptually in shared female experiences, it is also an interactive and multidimensional process, developing dialectically in the social relations of the sexes, and involving different forms of awareness among individuals and social groups. We argue that thinking about gender in this way provides a set of more sensitive and complex analytical tools for understanding women's experiences.3

BOUNDARIES

The development of the idea of separate spheres in the social science literature has stressed the assignment of women to the domestic realm, men to the public one, the physical separation between both spheres, and the social prestige attached to the public domain. Research on sex and gender has been influenced profoundly by the description of this basic structural division between the sexes, the apparent universality of the concept, and its explanatory power in the analysis of women's experience (Bernard, 1981; Cott, 1977; Douglas, 1977; Rosaldo, 1974). Concurrently, the concept of separate spheres has been criticized for its tendency to reify the division of social experience into public/male and private/female worlds, and to overlook the interactions between them (Kanter, 1976; Pleck, 1976; Rosaldo, 1980).

The use of the "separate spheres" formulation becomes increasingly problematic in the analysis of contemporary society. Unlike 19th century social life with its rigid social, physical, and ideological separation of the sexes, American society today is marked by the blurring of the public and private spheres, as women have entered the workforce in larger numbers, and men seemingly have become more involved in family life. At the same time, considerable social and cultural distance

3. Although women are the primary focus of our analysis of gender relations, the proposed schema is also appropriate for the study of men.
remains. Women's positions in the marketplace are neither secure nor taken for granted, while men's household roles are often marginal and limited. The dichotomy of separate spheres tends to simplify and reduce social life to two discrete physical environments without capturing the complexity of social and cultural divisions. Moreover, the concept has been used in a relatively static way, as a descriptive tool to chronicle and compare women's and men's activities. Only rarely have scholars gone beyond this approach to analyze the interactions between women and men (and among them) as they are influenced by and in turn shape these spheres.

We need a conceptualization that will allow us to express a basic commonality in the division(s) between the sexes and also to encompass definitions of changing patterns of social relations. Refocusing the analysis of gender divisions by using the concept of boundaries has several distinct advantages. First, it overcomes the problem of universality in the “separate spheres” formulation. Boundary is a more generic term which simultaneously allows us to see specific commonalities and discern actual differences in historical and current patterns of gender-based experiences (Rosaldo, 1980). Second, the concept of boundaries allays the problem of bifurcating gender relations through the assignment of women and men to separate spheres. There are many more boundaries which mark people's lives than the public-private dichotomy suggests. There are boundaries which divide women and men in leisure and work activities, as well as in face-to-face interactions. There are also smaller boundaries within larger ones. In the workplace, for example, gender difference may be maintained by an overall segmentation of the labor force by sex, denoted by the allocation of social space and privileges (e.g., typing pools vs. executive offices, different dining facilities, etc.) and reinforced by limitations on interpersonal behavior (e.g., unidirectional patterns of touch and naming, cf. Henley and Freeman, 1984). Finally, the concept of boundaries also suggests permeability, whereas the image of spheres connotes comparatively autonomous environments. Boundaries mark the social territories of gender relations, signalling who ought to be admitted or excluded. There are codes and rules which guide and regulate traffic, with instructions on which boundaries may be transversed under what conditions (cf. Laws, 1975; Osmond, 1984). As a consequence, boundaries are an important place to observe gender relations; these intersections reveal the normal, acceptable behaviors and attitudes as well as deviant, inappropriate ones. At the same time, boundaries highlight the dynamic quality of the structures of gender relations, as they influence and are shaped by social interactions (Ardener, 1981; Barth, 1970).

Describing the nature of boundaries and analyzing their congruence or lack of congruence will reveal a complex picture of gender arrangements. This approach should be particularly useful in comparative studies across time and in different cultures. In some periods and places, boundaries are mutually reinforcing or complementary, while in other instances they come into conflict. Within the American middle class in the 19th century, for example, the growing physical boundary between home and workplace was reinforced by a hegemonic ideological boundary, the cult of domesticity, as well as smaller social and cultural distinctions. While some women crossed these boundaries, and entered the public arena of education and voluntary association, most did so within the dynamics of their assignment to the home, rationalizing their activities as an extension of women's mission to protect and uplift the family (Cott, 1977). A somewhat similar ideological boundary marked the 1950s, in the set of ideas and images Betty Friedan (1963) labelled the “feminine mystique.” Unlike the 19th century, however, other boundaries operated at cross-purposes.

Physical boundaries between home and workplace become less salient in the mid-20th century as middle-class women entered the labor force in large numbers (Kolko, 1978). Moreover, the ideology of companionate marriage cut across the feminine mystique with its assertion of mutuality, togetherness and male involvement in family life (Simmons, 1982). Examination of the different relationships between boundaries may provide descriptive categories for viewing gender relations over time and in different settings.

The analysis of boundaries— their congruence and contradictions— may be useful in assessing stability and change in a system of gender relations. The above example suggests that mutually reinforcing boundaries will be indicators of relatively stable gender relations, while those that are contradictory may promote or reflect social change. An analysis of such change raises two important questions: How are boundaries reconstituted as existing boundaries are challenged and lose importance? What boundaries become or remain significant in defining gender difference and asymmetry as macro-level divisions become less distinct over time?

The boundaries between home and work provide examples of such changes. How is women's place redefined when family/work divisions become less rigid and women are no longer anomalies as wage-earners? One consequence is that boundaries within the workplace (e.g., occupational segregation) and interactional, micro-level boundaries assume increased significance in defining the subordinate position of women. Occupational segregation sets up divisions within the labor force which reduce women to secondary status; with low-paying, low-status jobs and their continued assignment to the home, women retain their primary definition as housewives (Blaxall and Reagan, 1976; Reskin, 1984). For women entering nontraditional occupations, other boundaries maintain women's marginal and subordinate place. Micro-level phenomena—the persistence of informal group behavior among men (e.g., after-work socializing, the uses of male humor, modes of corporate attire)—act to define insiders and outsiders thus maintaining gender-based distinctions (Kanter, 1977; Lorber, 1984).

A similar definition of boundaries may be seen in the current debate over men's growing role in the household. Men's household labor appears to have increased somewhat in recent years, while ideological support for it (e.g., public discussion of paternity leaves) has grown. At the same time, women and men continue to define male household activity as secondary and marginal, taking the form of “helping out.” The bulk of housework, childrearing and caretaking remains women's work (Hartmann, 1981; Vanek, 1974; Walker and Woods, 1976).

In both these examples, boundaries shift in small but important ways, indicating a change in gender relations and the ways individual women and men may experience them. At the same time, challenges to the stability of patriarchal social arrangements may be met by concessions which in effect readjust the boundaries, but allow the overall system of male dominance to persist.

Since gender involves the accentuation of human difference into dichotomous categories of femininity and masculinity, the social divisions between women and men constitute the primary boundary of gender relations. On the micro level of analysis, what happens at the boundaries between sexes is frequently evidence of exaggerated gender-specific behavior, as compared with same-sex behavior (Barth, 1970; Eidheim, 1970). Perhaps the most common example of this phenomenon is heterosexual dating behavior, with women and men often playing out traditional stereotypical feminine and masculine roles (cf. Komarovsky, 1946, 1973). On a broader level of analysis, the primacy of the hetersocial boundary is assured by the sexual division of labor and the enforcement of compulsory heterosexuality, both of which assert women's difference from men, their subordinate position, and their dependency (Rich, 1980; Rubin, 1975; Sacks, 1975).

5. The ideological support for men's domestic labor is apparent in several films (e.g., Kramer vs. Kramer) and other forms of popular culture. Recently househusbands and paternity leave have been the subjects of special attention. See, for example, Collins (1981).
The concept of boundaries should help delineate the interaction between homosocial and heterosocial relationships, and their role in the construction of gender. Recent research has identified the significance of female friendships, networks, and cultures in providing women with varying degrees of autonomy, support, and influence (Bernard, 1981; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). Similarly, scholars have documented the same-sex bonding in the realms of business, sports, and the military which supply men with resources, skills, solidarity, and power (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Such homosocial relations are influenced by the boundaries between the sexes, and in turn shape these same boundaries. Among 19th century middle-class women, for example, friendships centered on the home, kinship, and ritualistic events; these constituted a separate “female world,” which owed its emergence to the rigid structural differentiation between male/public and female/private domains (Cott, 1977; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). At the same time, the dynamics of female solidarity led some women into political agitation and reform activities, crossing and subverting this primary boundary (Buhle, 1982; Smith-Rosenberg, 1979). On the other hand, homosocial bonds among men may operate to strengthen the boundaries between the sexes, as they have in the world of sports. Women may pursue individual athletic activities which conflict least with social definitions of femininity, but they do not participate in team sports characterized by masculine rituals. Such rituals not only affirm male dominance through the exclusion of women, but they also promote group bonding, teamwork, and skills at negotiation and conflict resolution, qualities which help build and reinforce men’s power in other realms of life (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1983).

At the same time, there are boundaries within same-sex groups which influence and in turn are shaped by the division between women and men. For example, the historical barriers between prostitutes and “respectable” married women have reinforced the double standard by strengthening male sexual privilege while dividing women on the basis of sexual morality (Walkowitz, 1980). In contemporary society, aging is a boundary which separates younger and older women according to standards of physical attractiveness and youth, standards not applied to men (Bell, 1984). This in turn reinforces competition among women for men thus buttressing the institutional heterosexuality which constructs the primary male-female division and women’s subordination.

Boundaries between the sexes and within each sex, in their respective spatial, social, and psychological dimensions, delineate the structure of gender relations at a given time and place. However, to explain how and why boundaries change, we must uncover the ways in which individuals make and reshape their social worlds. Thus, the interpretation of gender relations must involve a theory of social process and consciousness. First we examine the social interactions between individuals and groups which establish, maintain, and potentially subvert boundaries; these are the processes of negotiation and domination.

**PROCESSES OF NEGOTIATION AND DOMINATION**

A major contribution of scholarship on gender has been the analysis of domination in explaining the subordinate position of women. In numerous studies of sex and gender, researchers have documented the ways in which men as a group have power over women as a group. Theorists have raised fundamental questions about the sources of domination and have proposed strategies for changing extant power relations (Jaggar and Rothenberg, 1984). Analyses of social life in the past and present reveal the extent of male control through physical coercion (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Russell, 1982), reproductive policies (e.g., Gordon, 1977; Petchesky, 1980), the institution of heterosexuality (e.g., MacKinnon, 1979; Rich, 1980), economic exploitation (e.g., Eisenstein, 1979; MacKinnon, 1979), and ideology (e.g., Rapp, 1982; Rowbotham, 1973).

Although this analysis is essential for understanding the dynamics of gender arrangements, it nevertheless has an inherent conceptual shortcoming. Regardless of the theoretical orientation, the assumption is made that women are the passive victims of a system of power or domination.
While women are not responsible for their own oppression and exploitation, at the same time they are not fully passive either (cf. Cott, 1977; Lewis, 1981). We need to explore the various ways women participate in setting up, maintaining, and altering the system of gender relations. This statement does not presume that women somehow ask for the sexism they experience. Rather, we are suggesting that there is more than one process going on, perhaps simultaneously. Domination explains the ways women are oppressed and either accommodate or resist, while negotiation describes the ways women and men bargain for privileges and resources. Given the considerable scholarship about domination, we focus our discussion on the process of negotiation, recognizing that the two processes are interdependent and exist concurrently.

The concept of negotiation suggests human agency. Both women and men are active participants, sometimes asking or inviting, sometimes demanding that resources be shared or reallocated. Implicit in this formulation is the recognition that both women and men have some resources they initially control. In addition, this conceptualization suggests that both parties to a negotiation must somehow agree in order for it to take effect. Not only must there be mutuality in consent, but the process of negotiation is reciprocal (cf. Blau, 1964; Bredemeier, 1978; Homans, 1961). Though men seem to do most of the inviting, women also have done the asking and made demands. Furthermore, the heterosocial negotiations which occur usually involve crossing a boundary, however small. The negotiations which do take place may act to either maintain or change structural boundaries.

The entry of women into the office as clerical workers provides one such example of gender negotiation. Margery Davies (1982) has shown that women were allowed into the office only after the invention of the typewriter and its popular acceptance as a tool for low-paid, unskilled labor. In other words, women were “invited” into the office as clerical workers, crossing a boundary that years earlier they could not have trespassed. Office work for women appeared to be a real asset to them since other opportunities for wage earning were limited. Women may choose to participate because they perceive possibilities for economic gains or status enhancement. While we can speak of individual women being invited into the office by individual male bosses, it is important to remember that the processes of invitation and negotiation operate on the level of social groups.

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6. The idea that women somehow “ask for” the prejudice and discrimination they receive, is often apparent in popular culture. West (1979) has tested this assumption in an analysis of responses to interrupted speech. Men were found to interrupt women three times more frequently than women interrupted men. Could this pattern, however, be explained by women’s submissiveness which would increase the probability of further interruptions? West’s data revealed that women and men whose speech was interrupted, responded to the interruptions in very similar ways. Few women or men used the most assertive response form; but comparable numbers of each sex used the less assertive forms. Thus, her findings demonstrate that there is no link between male-initiated interruption (domination) and female responses (submission).

7. Many references to women’s active cooperation with the oppressive aspects of gender arrangements assume false consciousness. But false consciousness is a problematic conceptualization because it suggests, in this case, that women are ignorant and/or passive. Other scholars have adopted an interactionist approach to the question of why women cooperate. See, for example, Eisenstein (1979), Finch (1983:121-69), Laws (1975), and Sotheran (1984).

8. Although our conception of negotiation is derived in part from exchange theory, it also departs from an exchange model in two fundamental ways. First, unlike exchange theorists, we maintain that there are two processes, negotiation and domination, which occur simultaneously. The co-existence of negotiation and domination thus obviates or resolves one of the problems associated with exchange theories — namely the lack of recognition of systematic inequalities. Second, our analysis posits that negotiations are reciprocal and consent is mutual, thereby suggesting that any relations of dependency tend to be complex and multidirectional. Although women and men have assets and resources which they control and may (re)allocate, these resources and consequent power are unequal. This formulation thus stands in contrast to the schema presented by exchange theorists who often characterize the exchange process and the resultant dependent social relations as unilateral. For a comprehensive critique of exchange theory, see Hartsock (1983a).
Women also have the resources to negotiate with men for access to privileges and opportunities. Micaela di Leonardo (1984) has demonstrated that women do the kin work—the labor involved in sustaining and nurturing ties and affiliations among family kin. Her sample, a group of Italian American families living in California, showed a pattern in which women had greater knowledge about kin, had stronger familial ties, and did more of the planning of kin gatherings than did the men. These women derived not only responsibilities and obligations from these duties, but prerogatives and power as well. As a result, women had control over a set of kin-based resources and permitted men access to those resources only if and when the women so desired (cf. Liebow, 1967; Stack, 1974).

While these examples demonstrate that women and men actively participate in negotiations, they also suggest a fundamental asymmetry in the process of negotiation which is integrally tied to the process of domination. Women's dependency is ensured through domination in many forms, including exploitation in the system of wage labor, structured through occupational segregation (Hartmann, 1976). Given their low economic status, most women are in some way ultimately dependent on men's work, a dependency reinforced by the ideology and material conditions of compulsory heterosexuality. Given their relative lack of structural power, women have fewer resources with which to negotiate, experience fewer situations in which they can set up negotiations, and derive fewer advantages from their negotiations.

What then is the effect of these negotiations on the system of gender relations? On the one hand, they may permit the system to continue in “dynamic stasis,” with reciprocal negotiations between women and men reifying structural boundaries in daily life. The traditional act of marriage exemplifies this form of negotiation, being a “free” exchange of obligations and responsibilities which reinforce heterosexuality and the sexual division of labor. However, an alternative consequence might be an adjustment in the boundaries either proceeded, accompanied, or followed by an alteration in consciousness. Men inviting women to cross a boundary or vice versa will not necessarily lead to lasting structural change. Indeed, ample evidence suggests that boundaries may be transgressed and consciousness reconstructed in such a way that a changed status for women is largely cosmetic or minimal. When women were invited into the office, for example, a change in consciousness occurred (i.e., it was then considered proper for women to be secretaries), but the boundaries merely shifted to incorporate the precise change without seriously disrupting the dominant system of gender relations. One could even argue that the system was strengthened, since the ideological and material conditions of secretarial work reinforced women's role in the family (M. Davies, 1982).

A similar pattern emerges for women in traditionally male occupations. Women are now “invited” to enter the corporation, but the consequences of the negotiation are contradictory: by insisting that women be “male” in their job performance (i.e., have managerial ability) while retaining their “femaleness,” the rules insure that women will remain outsiders. The popular literature on dress for success and assertiveness training exemplifies forms of negotiation that may lead to a change in some women's behaviors and consciousness, but not to lasting changes in the structure of opportunity, achievement and power for all women (cf., Harragan, 1977; Molloy, 1977).

At the same time, changes in consciousness and shifts in boundaries arising from negotiations, however small, may have real and direct consequences in people's lives, even if they do not result in a major change in women's status or in the system of gender relations. To understand the creation and impact of those changes, it is necessary to explore the realm of consciousness. At the most general of levels, consciousness may be depicted in a reciprocal and dynamic relation to social structure. The structural location of a person or group in a social system (i.e., boundaries) as well as individual or collective acts (i.e., social processes), both shape and are shaped by social consciousness.
CONSCIOUSNESS

Traditionally when researchers have studied gender consciousness, they have focussed their efforts essentially on one of two questions. Either they have investigated the conditions and consequences of feminist consciousness or they have considered the foundations and components of female consciousness. Studies of feminist consciousness have concentrated on the social and historical context which gives rise to an active awareness and visible consequences of that awareness. For example, DuBois (1978) has chronicled the relationship between the anti-slavery movement and the subsequent movement for women's suffrage; Eisenstein (1983) has traced the growth of feminist consciousness in women's groups. Studies such as these generally situate feminist consciousness in an active social movement, associating consciousness with those people participating in the movement and conversely attributing a lack of feminist consciousness to those outside it. One of the tendencies of this research, therefore, is to understand feminist consciousness as an either/or phenomenon—either you have it or you do not.

Scholars working on the content of female consciousness have proposed a similar formulation. They understand female consciousness as the outcome of women's unique set of experiences. Whether as the primary caretakers of children or more generally because of their social roles which are distinct from men's, women apprehend the world in ways that are unique to them. This female consciousness replicates the same dichotomy apparent in the treatment of feminist consciousness. Women share a common culture, ostensibly autonomous from the male world, from which they derive their consciousness. Comparable to the problem with feminist consciousness, female consciousness is understood as a dichotomous, discrete variable.

One shortcoming of these formulations is that the possible varieties of feminist and female consciousness often remain unexplored. We know very little about the actual forms of nascent consciousness and which factors help explain the means by which that consciousness develops or recedes. Moreover, if gender relations shape women's experience then it is necessary to consider both the interaction of women and men as social groups as well as the dynamics within "women's culture" if we are to apprehend the formation of female and feminist consciousness. We propose that viewing forms of gender consciousness along a continuum produces a more useful conception of consciousness, while examining gender-based interactions allows us to explain how these forms of consciousness develop and change.

Our analysis of consciousness distinguishes among three types—gender awareness, female/male consciousness, feminist/anti-feminist consciousness—that represent three points along a continuum. The first, gender awareness is basic to the development of the subsequent two forms—female/male and feminist/anti-feminist consciousness. Social scientists studying child development and socialization consistently report that very young children understand that they are either a girl or a boy and that this understanding has actual consequences for what they may or may not do (Bem, 1983; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). This form of consciousness which we label gender awareness is the most basic type. In this culture gender awareness is virtually universal past infancy, although it is neither infantile nor restricted to youngsters; it is present in parallel or reciprocal forms among both females and males. Gender awareness permeates most facets of everyday life in either real or symbolic ways. People continue to believe in a dimorphic world, even though the research on sex differences has shown that no quality or trait is associated exclusively with one sex or the other, except primary sex characteristics. Women are still thought of as weak or dependent, although we routinely encounter women who "objectively" are strong and independent. In fact gender attribution is so strong that it frequently distorts the empirical phenomenon (Broverman et al., 1970; Kessler and McKenna, 1978).

Gender awareness involves a non-critical description of the existing system of gender relations, whereby people accept the current social definitions of gender as natural and inevitable. Gender awareness, then, means that people may associate or correlate certain phenomena with one gender
group or another, but there is no evaluation of the ultimate significance or meaning of these attributions. For example, while a person's awareness of gender might indicate that women, in contrast to men, tend to be more sensitive and nurturant, this awareness would not enable her or him to discern the causes or effects of these traits. This form of gender consciousness ultimately involves a statement about the status quo, a remark concerning the ways things are for males and females. Moreover, as gender awareness is characterized by a basic acceptance of gender arrangements, any lingering or residual dissatisfaction with the status quo is individualized as a personal trouble. Being overly sensitive is seen as a personal female shortcoming; there is no social context for this problem. Similarly, a woman's failure to gain a job in the skilled trades is perceived as a result of her personal shortcomings, not an outcome of sexist hiring practices (cf. Mills, 1959). Small dissatisfaction with gender arrangements may arise, but they do not result in a questioning of that system or one's place within it.  

The second form of gender consciousness, female or male consciousness, is based on gender awareness but goes beyond the descriptive attributions to a recognition of the rights and obligations associated with being female or male. These privileges and responsibilities are socially constructed and specific to a particular culture at a given point in time. The gender-linked traits which are descriptive of women and men at the level of gender awareness come to be vested with a sense of reciprocal rights and responsibilities at the level of female or male consciousness.

Kaplan (1982) defines female consciousness as acceptance of a society's gender system. Female consciousness "... emerges from the division of labor by sex, which assigns women the responsibility of preserving life. But, accepting this task, women with female consciousness demand the rights that their obligations entail" (Kaplan, 1982:545). While we agree with Kaplan, we want to offer two refinements. First, our understanding of boundaries tells us that the sexual division of labor represents a sum total of several more discrete boundaries. Thus, our model suggests that the source of this form of consciousness is more accurately depicted as a person's specific location in a system of gender arrangements. Second, we want to emphasize a notion implicit in Kaplan's definition. By demanding rights, the conceptualization of female consciousness connotes the idea that this consciousness is dynamic and malleable. Female consciousness is the outcome of processes of negotiation and domination, and their reciprocal interaction, as well as the result of women's structural location. Moreover, female consciousness influences processes of negotiation and domination, and ultimately, the boundaries shaping gender relations.

Recent research suggests the general dimensions of female consciousness: First, women are concerned with immediate material reality (Kaplan, 1982). The sexual division of labor situates women in the position of child bearers, responsible for sustaining life as well. As such, women are obligated and feel responsible for meeting survival needs of their families. Women, therefore, behave in accordance with normative expectations and act to further support those expectations. Concerns for the necessities of everyday life take numerous forms. Women concerned about food, shelter, and well-being, for example, have organized and protested when state regulations made it difficult if not impossible for them to feed their families.  

At a more general level, responsibility for everyday life has meant that women are more apt to apprehend phenomena concretely rather than abstractly (Smith, 1979). In part because of their heightened responsibility for others, women act as mediators (Gilligan, 1982; Hartsock, 1983b). Gilligan (1982:147) discusses women's complex negotiation between the ethic of self-sacrifice and

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9. This descriptive appreciation of gender is consistent with many studies utilizing a socialization model which is premised on consensus and stasis rather than conflict and change.

the sense of moral responsibility: "Thus morality, rather than being opposed to integrity or tied to an ideal of agreement, is aligned with 'the kind of integrity' that comes from 'making decisions after working through everything you think is involved and important in the situation,' and taking responsibility for choice." Finally, the constraints women experience in their daily lives lead to a consciousness of female inferiority. In comparison with men, women learn intellectual, moral, emotional, and physical inferiority. This generalized sense of inferiority leads women to believe that they are incomplete and inadequate without a man—father, husband, etc. Moreover, because of their perceived abilities and the existence of real threats, women learn fear and have an ingrained sense of curfew and exclusion (see, for example, Barry, 1979; Brownmiller, 1975; MacKinnon, 1979).

As Kaplan (1982) clearly documents in her research, female consciousness has both a progressive or revolutionary potential as well as a conservative or reactionary one. When women act to protest or disrupt the existing social order because they cannot satisfactorily fulfill their obligations, they challenge existing powers. The eventual outcome of such protests depends on a larger social context, but at a minimum underscores the value women place on maintaining social life (Kaplan, 1982). We would want to know what the relationship is between clearly demarcated boundaries of gender and the development of female consciousness.

An understanding of female consciousness and more broadly, gender relations, must entail an analysis of male consciousness. Is it identical to or even comparable to female consciousness? Given the differences in structural locations and social processes between women and men, male consciousness appears to be profoundly distinct from female consciousness. Male consciousness is characterized by the value placed on individual autonomy, a sense of entitlement, and a relative superiority to women. Men's moral judgments are guided by abstract principles rather than the concrete dimensions of everyday life (Gilligan, 1982). Recently Ehrenreich (1983) has chronicled some of the changes in male consciousness over the last thirty years. Her analysis is instructive but raises additional questions central to our concerns here. For example, what is the effect of relative power, and differences in the type or form of power, on consciousness? In what ways is consciousness heightened or diminished by such power? Further research into the relationship between female and male consciousness, and its consequences for the system of gender relations is needed.

Finally, female/male consciousness must be distinguished from consciousness that is explicitly feminist or antifeminist/masculinist. To paraphrase Marx, we need to understand the formation of a gender for itself. Feminist and antifeminist consciousness involves a highly articulated challenge to or defense of the system of gender relations in the form of ideology, as well as a shared group identity, and a growing politicization resulting in a social movement (cf. Evans, 1980; Freeman, 1973). Recent research extensively explores this issue, documenting the origins, organizational development, and ideology of the first and second waves of feminism (DuBois, 1978; Evans, 1980; Flexner, 1973). It also has examined the circumstances in which feminist consciousness reinforced or conflicted with other forms of consciousness based on class, race, ethnicity or sexual preference (Beck, 1982; Buhle, 1982; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981). In investigating the circumstances in which women define their interests as gender-based, it is necessary to examine the areas of female assertion and power, and the ways women move from female to feminist consciousness. At the same time, the formation of feminist consciousness must be seen in relation to antifeminist ideology and activity (see, for example, Eisenstein, 1982). The rise of feminism occurs in a dialectical context, in which the feminist challenge to the existing system of gender arrangements evokes

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11. There is a dearth of understanding of a comparable consciousness among men. Is it feminist, masculinist, or are the conceptual categories totally distinct for men and women?
an organized response, which in turn influences the nature of feminist consciousness and practice. This process has become particularly apparent in the New Right's movement against feminist demands for legal equality, economic justice and reproductive rights; it may also be seen in earlier historical periods such as the organized opposition to suffrage in the late 19th century. The dynamics of gender-conscious groups, particularly in the last one hundred years, have forcefully shaped gender relations, contributing to the changing definition of boundaries and rules for negotiation and domination.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have argued that gender relations can be fruitfully understood by recasting our conceptual framework. These redefinitions should focus our attention on several issues which have consequences for future research on sex and gender.

From a definitional perspective, the conception of gender as a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions is central. Such a view highlights social interaction rather than more unidirectional processes of socialization, adaptation, and/or oppression. This emphasis suggests that we appreciate women as the active creators of their own destinies within certain constraints, rather than as passive victims or objects. At the same time, this suggests that feminist scholars must avoid analyzing men as one-dimensional, omnipotent oppressors. Male behavior and consciousness emerge from a complex interaction with women as they at times initiate and control, while at other times, cooperate or resist the action of women. Clearly researchers need to examine men in the context of gender relations more precisely and extensively than they have at the present time.

This conceptualization also urges us to examine stasis and change in a more consistent and comprehensive fashion, thereby avoiding the mistake of studying change as an either/or phenomenon. We want to identify the mechanisms which perpetuate existing gender arrangements and those which tend to elicit change. Changes in gender relations occur along the three dimensions of boundaries, negotiation/domination, and consciousness; change in any one variable elicits change in the other two. For example, there cannot be a boundary shift unless it is preceded, accompanied, or followed by changes in negotiation/domination and consciousness. The sequencing of such changes, both in terms of patterns and timing, needs further study. In addition to these questions we also need to look at the magnitude of change. Large versus small-scale change in gender arrangements must be evaluated in terms of the number and proportion of groups affected, their centrality and susceptibility to change, and the degree and suddenness of change. We are also interested in the durability of change. Which kinds of changes are resistant to countervailing forces, and which seem to be more tentative, temporary, or makeshift? How are changes in gender relations challenged or co-opted? With the nature of change specified, we will be able to compare more precisely systems of gender relations across historical time and across cultures.

Grounding our research in these dimensions also will facilitate comparisons of systems of gender relations with other systems of domination. Such comparative work is important as it yields a greater understanding of the dynamics of domination. We can distinguish the forms of oppression that are unique to gender from those that are common to all systems of oppression.

Recently, scholars have pointed to the concepts of gender, gender relations, and sex/gender systems as potentially integrating the wide-ranging empirical research on women. Toward this end, our approach has been to redefine three concrete categories for the analysis of gender. These categories offer both a conceptual framework and a research strategy which recommend greater specificity and comparability in examining gender relations. We hope that this framework will encourage researchers to clarify and extend their analyses of gender relations along both empirical and theoretical dimensions.
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