Reading Guide Anthro 30A
Week 7 – Gender and Power


Note: Michelle Rosaldo is widely considered to be one of the very first “feminist anthropologists” in the US. She became well known for developing a conceptual framework analyzing gender by using a perspective that society was a dichotomy: the public sphere of society was dominated by men and the domestic or private sphere of society was primarily the domain of women. Although she first theorized that all human societies were divided up in this manner, she later came to a conclusion that this type of social dichotomy was a western (and therefore not a universal) social practice. Some prominent influences on her theoretical perspective include Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Claude Levi-Strauss.

One year after this article was published Michelle Rosaldo would die from an accidental fall from a cliff while hiking to a village in the Philippines. Afterwards, her husband (also an anthropologist) found her body lying at the bottom of the cliff.

1. According to Rosaldo, social science has tended to portray gender difference as ultimately the result of what? (p. 393)
2. Does Rosaldo claim that women are subordinated (constrained or confined) in the exact same way in every society? (p. 394)
3. According to Rosaldo, what type of work is almost exclusively women’s work and demonstrates male dominance? (bottom of p. 394)
4. Is male dominance or sexual asymmetry constructed in the same way in every society according to Rosaldo? (bottom of p. 395)
5. What type of “facts” does Rosaldo believe has reproduced male dominance? (top of p. 396)
6. To what “spheres” does Rosaldo claim that sexual asymmetry corresponds? (top of p. 397)
7. What sort of responsibilities does Rosaldo believe ties women to the domestic sphere? (pp. 397-399)
8. Does Rosaldo believe that gender asymmetry can/should be explained simply as the result of biological differences between men and women? (pp. 400-401)
9. Why did the Victorian social scientist, Herbert Spencer, claim that women’s place was in the home? (p. 402)
10. According to Emile Durkheim, which gender was more socialized? (p. 403)
11. Whose world was assumed to be more likely to change or evolve over time according to 19th century theorists...men’s or women’s? (p. 404)
12. Which gender was considered responsible for creating and building society? (pp. 404-405)
13. Which of these has the social sciences tended to view as having no history – the public or private (domestic) sphere? (p. 407)
14. Does Rosaldo agree that it is appropriate to view the private sphere as being ahistorical (unchanging/unevolved)? (p. 409)

15. Although women were shown to have provided most of the food in very early human societies, which gender was claimed to be the most important by social scientists and paleontologists of the 1960s? Why? (p. 410)

16. How did feminist scholars react to the claims mentioned in #15 above? (p. 411)

17. In what ways does Rosaldo claim that male and female sexuality worked differently in hunter-gatherer societies? (p. 413) In these societies which sex was more interested in marriage and why according to Rosaldo? (p. 413)

18. Does Rosaldo believe that women’s and men’s differing roles are adequately explained as being the result of biological differences? (p. 417)


Note: Karen Sacks uses a Marxist perspective in this article. Marx and Engels essentially claimed that social power and status is tied to who controls labor. In this article, Sacks argues that the more women’s labor is co-opted by men as their own private property, the less independence and the social status women have. Sacks argues that in some African societies, women and men are seen as social equals. However in other societies women have less than equal social status with men. She compares three different general types of societies found in Africa. In those societies where women have control over their own labor and control property they have equal status with men. However, in other societies analyzed by Sacks, women have lower status than men when they have less control over the products of their own labor.

1. According to Frederick Engels, the decline of women’s status was associated with what? (p. 208)

2. According to Engels, what was “communistic” about early human society? (bottom of p. 208 to top of p. 209)

3. Was the household separate from the “public” in early human societies according to Engels? (p. 209)

4. What kind of production did Engels claim existed in early human societies? (p. 209)

5. According to Engels what was the first type of private property and who owned it? (p. 210)

6. What sort of relationship did owners of private property have with their households according to Engels? (p. 211)

7. According to Sacks, when one segment of society can “give” more than another segment within that society, the receiver is expected to give back by what means? How is labor power involved in this social equation? (p. 212)

8. What type of society existed among the Mbuti? What about the Lovedu, Pondo and Ganda? (p. 213) Which of these have “production for use” and which have “production for exchange?”
9. In which society are women’s productive activities not seen as social and viewed as only “domestic?” (p. 214)

10. In which societies are women considered to be the equal of men (p. 214)

11. In which society must a woman have a male representative to act for her? In which society are women excluded from participation in social events (p. 215)

12. Which society has the most restrictions (and punishments) on women who take lovers? (p. 216)

13. In Lovedu society, women may do what seemingly unusual thing with their cattle? (p. 216)

14. In Pondo society, men who have helped the king in warfare may be rewarded by receiving what items from the king? Can women own these same goods in Pondo society? (p. 216)

15. Who owns resources in Mbuti society? (p. 217)

16. In Mbuti society, can a husband expect to receive compensation if his wife takes a lover (does he “own” his wife’s sexuality)? (p. 217)

17. In the class system found in Ganda society, are all women positioned in the lowest social class? Why or why not? (p. 218)

18. Can a Pondo man prevent his wife from having an affair or stop her from divorcing him? (p. 218)

19. According to Engels, if a woman is not considered to own part of the household or family property then her relationship with her husband is similar to what kind of relationship? (p. 219)

20. Does Sacks agree with Engels that the ownership of private property is the ultimate basis for male dominance in class society? (p. 219)

21. According to Sacks, what do class societies do with the work of men vs. the work of women? (p. 220)

22. Why does sacks claim that men, rather than women, are more likely to be intensively exploited in class societies? (p. 220) In what way is Sack’s explanation similar to Rosaldo’s argument in the previous article?

23. Who does Sacks consider to hold the dominant role in ensuring social reproduction (the production of the next generation)? (p. 221)

24. According to Sacks, why is women’s work not considered “real” work in class and capitalist societies? (p. 222)

25. According to Sacks, who was responsible for dividing men’s and women’s labor and developing the social attitude that women’s work was not of real value? (p. 222)

26. What does Sacks consider to be the solution for gender inequality? (bottom of p. 222)

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Note: Jarvinen’s article is an analysis of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu’s understanding of gender relations. Bourdieu felt strongly that gender inequality was still a major social issue even in supposedly more “advanced” western societies such as
modern France. Bourdieu’s analysis of gender is strongly influenced by the concepts of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. But he also develops his own conceptual framework that incorporates his perspective that power and inequality occur “invisibly” and are often (unconsciously) self-reproduced.

1. What are some of the dichotomies that Bourdieu observed in Kabyle (Algerian) society? Does Bourdieu consider these dichotomies to be cognitively independent or to be correlated with one another? (p. 2)
2. How does Bourdieu’s public and private seem to correlate with those that Rosaldo envisioned in the first article? (pp. 2-3)
3. A Kabyle man who has no challenges or enemies is comparable to what? (p. 3)
4. According to Bourdieu, in order for society to function what must happen to the “contrasts”? (p. 3)
5. How is a Kabyle woman who is outside of male control viewed in Kabyle society? (p. 4)
6. Symbolic power is the same as the power to do what, according to Bourdieu? (p. 4)
7. Based on Marx’s perspective, who does Bourdieu claim holds controls symbolic power? (p. 4)
8. Does Bourdieu claim that symbolic power is less effective than actual violence? (p. 4)
9. According to Max Weber (and Bourdieu) how do the dominated classes view their domination? Symbolic power is always based upon what? (p. 5)
10. Our body “hexitis” is divided along what kind of lines? Why is it difficult to change your “hexitis”? (p. 5)
11. What is “doxa” and who determines it? Does Bourdieu believe that people can easily revolt against the doxa? (p. 5)
12. Does Bourdieu believe that the dominated even feel that they are dominated? Why or why not? (p. 6)
13. What does Bourdieu argue that ritual actually does? (p. 6)
14. Why are social gender boundaries referred to as “magic” by Bourdieu? (p. 6)
15. The privileged classes (the status quo) tend to argue that gender categories are a reflection of what? (p. 6)
16. Who does Bourdieu argue becomes the controller and oppressor of women? (p. 7)
17. Who is the female body ‘for’ according to Bourdieu? Who judges men’s bodies? (p. 7)
18. According to Bourdieu, although there is a social perception that men are innately better public speakers than women, the real reason for men’s success and women’s difficulty in speaking is due to what? In what sense is this cause “invisible?” (p. 8)
19. Bourdieu argues that as more women and men from lower classes (and minorities) earn university degrees, the power/value of such degrees diminishes. Why? (pp. 8-9)
20. Does Bourdieu view the university/academia system as actually providing full access to cultural centers of power for women, minorities and the lower classes (the so-called “non-inheritors”)? (p. 9)

21. What does habit or “habitus” do with morality? (p. 11)

22. How does doxa effect the relationship between social conditions and a persons inner desires and dreams? (p. 11)

23. What does Jarvinen view as weakness in Bourdieu’s analysis? (p. 12)