

Reading and Doing Ethnography

Social Anthropology 314

2.4 Reflexive ideology

Reflexivity is *self-awareness*.

We've just had a hasty tour of
culture and ideology theory.

Ideology: Is usually seen as unconscious

- >> It can be *naturalized* or *universalized*.
- >> Legitimation works better if it's seemingly grounded in reasons.

But sometimes people are aware of their own ideological investments.

"I know it's traditional, but..."

"I know it seems unfair, but..."

And often enough there is ideology in scholarship

Researchers are just people; they don't leave culture at the door

Gayle Rubin

American anthropologist, active in lesbian politics (b. 1949)

Rubin interview with Karen Miller (1997)

I decided to go (to Michigan) quite by accident. I grew up in the South in a very small town. The town was extremely conservative and claustrophobic; I felt rather out of place. I wanted the privacy and anonymity that comes with a certain size, and the University of Michigan had a larger population than the town from which I hailed. I was a little naive about how big of a jump it would be. It was all a little overwhelming for a kid from a small Southern town.

When I got to Michigan, the campus was in a ferment over the Vietnam War. But the first thing I got involved in was completely different. In '66, the dorms were supposed to substitute for parental supervision. The principle was called in loco parentis. Consequently, the University had curfews for women and rules restricting who could go into whose room.

The only time students could have members of the opposite gender in their rooms was during supervised visiting periods called "open opens." During these visits, the doors had to be open at least 45 degrees, and monitors patrolled the halls to make sure everyone's feet were on the floor. There were also dress codes for women. I lived in a coed dorm, Markley Hall.

Women had to wear skirts to get into the dining hall for some meals, but there was no dress code for male students. Males also had no curfew. Female students had to be in by 11pm on week nights, and midnight on weekends.

We finally tackled the dress code. But while the male and female students had been united in opposition to the curfews and restrictions on dorm room visits, our interests diverged over the dress codes. Some of our former male allies wanted to maintain the dress codes because, as they said, they "wanted to see women's legs." We responded by telling them that this did not give them the right to dictate our attire. Eventually, we prevailed and by the end of that year, there were no curfews, no dress codes for women at Markley Hall, and no effective restrictions on visitors of the opposite sex in dormitory rooms. This was my introduction to campus politics and it was accidental and spontaneous.

It took me a while to understand what was at stake in the anti-war movement, which was the primary political activity on campus. I had come from this small Southern town where no one had been talking about the Vietnam War. Everyone there was talking about integration. The issue that dominated my junior high and high school years was school de-segregation. My family supported integration, as did I. This was not a popular position among whites, most of whom were vehemently pro-segregation. The defense of segregation brought out a lot of ugly rationalizations for racism, as well as a great deal of hostility both toward the black population and toward "moderate" whites who opposed segregation.

There was a surge of popular racism and "Southern" patriotism which had many expressions, including a sudden passion on behalf of "states' rights" and opposition to so-called federal "intervention" on behalf of non-white citizens. Confederate flags were flown from state capitals and legislatures as expressions of this kind of sentiment. I find it extremely ironic that people are still, in my home state of South Carolina, defending the Confederate flag as a memorial to the confederate soldiers who fought in the Civil War because these flags were only put up in the early fifties, and as symbols of defiance against integration.

KM: Tell me more about your women's group. Was it just some of your friends who were women?

GR: No, it was in effect an early consciousness-raising group, although we lacked that terminology. In the fall of '68, a number of women who were associated or affiliated with draft resistance got together to have a discussion about women's issues. It was classic! There were evidently many early women's liberation groups that grew out of the draft resistance networks. There were about ten or twenty of us and we met on Thursday nights. We called ourselves "The Thursday Night Group."

What did it feel like to be a part of a movement? What did that mean to you, and who did you imagine was inside and outside of that movement?

GR: During the late sixties and early seventies there was a definite sense of being a part of something large and wondrous, even though that "something" was somewhat amorphous. But there were strong social movements that seemed connected to one another and that were all pursuing some vision of social justice or improvement in people's lives. These included the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the labor movement... The women's and gay movements were part of this larger constituency for positive, democratic, and egalitarian social change. There was a sense of shared goals and of being connected with others. An active press provided an endless supply of journals and papers to read.

Rubin's paper was a critique of
masculinism in social theory

What then are these relationships by which a female becomes an oppressed woman?

"One begins to have a sense of a systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products." (158)

Freud and Lévi-Strauss... They see neither the implications of what they are saying, nor the implicit critique which their work can generate when subjected to a feminist eye. (159)

Marxist theory (dominant in the late 60s) doesn't have much of a theory of gender and even less of sexuality. But it does have a theory of how social structures are historically determined by economic, political, ideological and material forces.

*Sex as we know it—gender identity,
sexual desire and fantasy, concepts of
childhood—is itself a social product.
We need to understand the relations of
its production. (166)*

Patriarchy is a specific form of male dominance, and the use of the term ought to be confined to the Old Testament-type pastoral nomads from whom the term comes, or groups like them. Abraham was a Patriarch—one old man whose absolute power over wives, children, herds, and dependents was an aspect of the institution of fatherhood, as defined in the social group in which he lived (168).

Lévi-Strauss

Exchange of women is what keeps social structures functioning.

Individuals are engendered in order that marriage be guaranteed (180).

Lévi-Straussian functional requirements:

- >> Incest taboo
- >> Obligatory heterosexuality
- >> Asymmetric division of sexes

Freud & Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis has often become more than a theory of the mechanisms of the reproduction of sexual arrangements; it has been one of those mechanisms. (184)

Rough outlines

- >> Children are naturally bisexual.
- >> Developmental "complexes" force us into accepting hetero gender roles.

"The boy renounces his mother for fear that otherwise his father would castrate him (refuse to give him the phallus and make him a girl)."

"For the boy, the taboo on incest is a taboo on certain women. For the girl, it is a taboo on all women." (193)

Socialization is brutal

Rubin's utopias

The girl's love for the mother is induced by the mother's job of child care. The girl is then forced to abandon this love because of the female sex role—to belong to a man. If the sexual division of labor were such that adults of both sexes cared for children equally, primary object choice would be bisexual.

If heterosexuality were not obligatory, this early love would not have to be suppressed, and the penis would not be overvalued. If the sexual property system were reorganized in such a way that men did not have overriding rights in women (if there were no exchange of women) and if there were no gender, the entire Oedipal drama would be a relic. In short, feminism must call for a revolution in kinship. (199)

Class questions

Sources

"Revisioning Ann Arbor's Radical Past: An Interview with Gayle S. Rubin," <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mfsfront;c=mfs;c=mfsfront;idno=ark5583.0012.006;g=mfsg;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1>