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)

Girl socialization con't

Since she is in a homosexual position vis-a-vis the mother, the rule of heterosexuality which dominates the scenario makes her position excruciatingly untenable. The mother, and all women by extension, can only be properly beloved by someone "with a penis" (phallus). Since the girl has no "phallus," she has no right to love her mother or another woman, since she is herself destined to some man. She does not have the symbolic token which can be exchanged for a woman. (193-4)

Cultural stereotypes have been mapped onto the genitals. (195)

Socialization is brutal

Horney on Freud

When she [the girl] first turns to a man (the father), it is in the main only by way of the narrow bridge of resentment... [Freud] sees the wish for motherhood not as an innate formation, but as something that can be reduced psychologically to its ontogenetic elements and draws its energy originally from homosexual or phallic instinctual elements... It would follow, finally, that women's whole reaction to life would be based on a strong subterranean resentment.

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 woudl 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

- I'm not sure if this was properly addressed by the text but is it right to assume that perhaps Freud's concept of "penis envy", or maybe just a modern interpretation of it, could be that it has less to do with women wanting to be men or be like men, and more to do with women being envious of the position that men hold in society due to patriarchy. Is penis envy just envy of the power that being a man grants you in society?
- How is the gender debate in Rubin's reading a reflection of today's society?
- In Rubin's description of Marx's idea of power relations between male and female and reproduction of labour, where does religion stand? Is Marx's ideas influenced by religion or does he get his ideas from observation only?

- In the passage, sexuality and procreation is equated to a need adjacent to eating. If this is was the case and women are the main means of procreation, would it not make more sense to hold women at a much higher standard than other men rather than oppress them. When viewing this as from a capitalist perspective one would consider women as assets but yet they are not treated that way?
- Considering the women who choose to stay home and be labelled as a caretaker, how much money would their work be categorized or worth?
- What does Rubin mean by the "exchange of women"?

- How does Rubin piece together his argument? And remain in a position where he remains unbiased and open to all arguments, so as to not have his paper invalid?
- Rubin used both sociological and psychological perspectives from different theorists to reflect on womens oppression. Using different views and perspectives of others doesnt this put emphasis on ideology regarding women? Since his paper is also very theoretical.
- How would Rubin view marriage in the modern context, for example in the United States, which typically does not have arranged marriages? In what ways would a nonwestern woman approach this same topic, as arranged marriage and brideprice still exist in many places?
- Is this a reading explicitly about Feminism?

- None really, I find her argument quite compelling. Her use of Marx's theories showed me a different way of understanding Marx.
- How would you describe his approach to ethnographic studies in terms of being an outsider when studying a culture
- What is the connection between the tradition of a father "giving away the bride" and the exchange of women? Does the author view it in the same light as slavery or prostitution, in the sense that the daughter will always be someone's property?
- What if during those times, there were a smaller number of people who actually cared about their place in society? What if it never occurred to people that they are being oppressed? Would this article still be relevant? Also, was it necessary to include Marxism if his research focuses on sexuality and not women in the workplace

- I see Rubin throughout her work draws on theorists ie marx. Is this allowed in ethnographic research and does this paper count to be an anthropological piece or more sociological ?
- In the 1940s there was a huge spike in the independence of women due to the WW2, but in the 1950s after the war there was a spike in propaganda to get women 'back in the house'. Would this be the sort of political economy that pushed back? Or was it merely just the ideology at the time? Because ever since then, in times of war the moral value of individuals drop. So, is this considered the time of the rebellion?
- The reading describes certain characteristics of Freud's "Electra" complex theory. On basis of what research evidence was this theory formulated?

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