

## Introduction

Why is Woman “The Other”? *Are* women universally the “second sex”? Like Simone de Beauvoir (1953), who raised these questions in what must remain one of the most articulate and penetrating essays yet written on women’s position in human societies, we ask them not simply out of some sort of abstract, intellectual curiosity, but because we are searching for ways to think about ourselves.

Along with many women today, we are trying to understand our position and to change it. We have become increasingly aware of sexual inequities in economic, social, and political institutions and are seeking ways to fight them. A first step in that direction involves the recognition that in learning to be women in our own society, we have accepted, and even internalized, what is all too often a derogatory and constraining image of ourselves. Contemporary feminists have only begun to uncover the depth and pervasiveness of our inegalitarian sexual ideology—to perceive, and then to question, assumptions about the nature of the female that obtain in everything from psychology to literature to common sense. What once seemed necessary and natural has begun to look arbitrary and unwarranted. What once could be assumed, ignored, or tacitly acknowledged now seems problematic and difficult to explain. And what has been true of common cultural stereotypes has, of course, been true of the view of women implicit in Western social science. For the most part, scholars have taken for granted a view of women as passive sexual objects, as devoted mothers, and as dutiful wives. There have been exceptions—a handful of ethnographies that take a woman’s perspective (Chifñas, 1973; Fernea, 1965; Goodale, 1971; Kaberry, 1939, 1952; Landes, 1938, 1947; Leith-Ross, 1952; Strathern, 1972; Wolf, 1972), some theoretical essays (Ardener, 1971; Schlegel, 1972), two collections of articles on women in specific geographic areas (Paulme, 1963; Sweet, 1967), some writings on child rearing, and the

suggestive explorations into the relations of culture and sexuality associated with names like DuBois and Mead. Aside from these, however, anthropologists in writing about human culture have followed our own culture's ideological bias in treating women as relatively invisible and describing what are largely the activities and interests of men. In order to correct that bias, to alter our conceptions of the female, and to understand their source, what we need are new perspectives. Today, it seems reasonable to argue that the social world is the creation of both male and female actors, and that any full understanding of human society and any viable program for social change will have to incorporate the goals, thoughts, and activities of the "second sex."

Within the field of anthropology, a concern to understand and to change women's position has generated a number of important questions. Are there societies that, unlike our own, make women the equals or superiors of men? If not, are women "naturally" men's inferiors? Why do women, in our own society and elsewhere, accept a subordinate standing? How, and in what kinds of situations, do women exercise power? How do women help to shape, create, and change the private and public worlds in which they live? New questions demand new kinds of answers. The development of a science depends on discovering, in facts previously taken for granted, a field for serious investigation and research. In recognizing old biases and directing attention to questions previously ignored, we hope to take such a step in this collection. Although the authors writing here have different political and intellectual commitments, all believe that anthropology has suffered from a failure to develop theoretical perspectives that take account of women as social actors. And all feel that our conceptions of human social life will be improved and broadened when they address women's lives and interests along with those of men.

Perhaps the first question that arises in an anthropological study of women is whether there are societies, unlike our own, in which women are publicly recognized as equal to or more powerful than men. This question was addressed in the evolutionary theories of nineteenth-century writers like Bachofen (1861) and L. H. Morgan (1851, 1877), who suggested that in an earlier stage of human development the social world was organized by a principle called matriarchy, in which women had power over men. Although this view has excited the imaginations of several recent feminist writers (Davis, 1972; E. Morgan, 1972), most academic anthropologists have dismissed it out of hand. The matriarchal arguments draw on several kinds of evidence: data from contemporary societies in which women make the major contribution to subsistence; data from societies in which descent is reckoned through women (matri-

liny), rather than through both parents (bilateral) or from father to son (patriliny); myths of ancient rule by women; archaeological remains suggesting that there have been female goddesses, queens, or a tendency to kill infant males in certain earlier societies. As against this, the current anthropological view draws on the observation that most and probably all contemporary societies, whatever their kinship organization or mode of subsistence, are characterized by some degree of male dominance.

Whereas some anthropologists argue that there are, or have been, truly egalitarian societies (Leacock, 1972), and all agree that there are societies in which women have achieved considerable social recognition and power, none has observed a society in which women have publicly recognized power and authority surpassing that of men (see the papers by Rosaldo and Ortner, this volume). Everywhere we find that women are excluded from certain crucial economic or political activities, that their roles as wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than are the roles of men. It seems fair to say then, that all contemporary societies are to some extent male-dominated, and although the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of human social life.

The archaeological data are more problematic, since they have to be interpreted in terms of a set of assumptions based on our knowledge of existing cultures or on some presumed but not presently observed patterns. Elaborate female burials might, for example, indicate a world in which women were the rulers; but they could equally be the remains of wives, mistresses, concubines of male elites, or women who became heads of state in lieu of male heirs in a royal family. Female sculptures may represent goddesses, but there are historically documented and well-studied contemporary societies that manifest female fertility cults while at the same time placing political power in the hands of men. Similarly, myths of primordial female eminence are found today in male-dominated societies, and most anthropologists believe that such myths, rather than reflecting history, are expressions of a culture's dreams or fantasies, or validations of political alignments in the societies in which they are told. The issues involved here are complex, but the evidence of contemporary anthropology gives scant support to an argument for matriarchy. Though our knowledge of the past is sometimes sketchy, there is little reason to believe that early sexual orders were substantially different from those observed around the world today.

Matriarchal accounts of past societies have, of course, the advantage of suggesting that contemporary sexual asymmetry is in no way natural. And one might even argue that the idea of matriarchy constitutes a

useful myth, a guide for present action, and that it is important insofar as it enjoins us to imagine a world in which women have real power (Webster and Newton, 1972). At the same time, as Bamberger points out in her contribution to this collection, these accounts often have the disadvantage of highlighting woman's failure as a ruler, and so legitimize a social order dominated by men. As a myth or a utopian vision, the idea of matriarchy has currency today as a source of hope for women. As a recognized fact, however, its status is far from strong. Though the authors writing here follow anthropological consensus in discounting matriarchal theories, they try to provide alternative approaches to the questions of woman's possibilities and woman's past.

What, then, do anthropologists know about our heritage? Does the rejection of matriarchy as an accurate description of early society imply that female subordination is somehow necessary and natural, that it is determined by the biological constitutions of the human species? There are, of course, a number of ways of answering these questions, only some of which are explored in any detail in this book. In order to explain the apparent universality of male dominance, one can, for instance, ask what is its origin and seek evidence for a fixed and given core of "human nature" in biological data, in parallels between the social life of humans and primates, or in reconstructions of the life of early women and men. Or putting aside the questions of origins, one can ask what features of the organization of all known human societies have permitted them to produce and reproduce an inegalitarian sexual order. Since the papers in this book address the second kind of question, it might be helpful to review some of the problems and issues associated with the first.

Surely no one would question that the sexes differ in biological constitution. Women lactate and bear children, and this fact has important consequences for human social life. The sexes differ in reproductive organization, in aspects of hormonal endowments, and probably in size and potential physical strength. (For some recent reviews of the relevant literature, see Maccoby, 1966; Bardwick, 1971; Hutt, 1972; Money and Ehrhardt, 1972.) But the observation of physical differences itself tells us little about the social worlds we live in; for humans, biology becomes important largely as it is interpreted by the norms and expectations of human culture and society. For example, biologists may tell us that men are, on the average, stronger than women; but they cannot tell us why male strength and male activities in general seem to be valued by people in all cultures. Again, it is a biological fact that women lactate, but the behavioral consequences of the fact will differ, depending on the availability of bottles, the amounts and kinds of protein in the diet, or the

prevalence of an ideology holding, for example, that children need to be fed every time they cry.

Humans, unlike animals, have the capacity to interpret and perhaps to alter their biological constitutions, to regulate their behavior through the mediation of symbolic forms, like language. Although science has not yet determined the extent to which hormones shape the behavior of humans, it seems likely that humans are not subject to the same sorts of behavioral programming that characterize the lower primates. In fact, it has been argued that human biology requires human culture. In Geertz's words, one striking fact about our "central nervous system is the relative incompleteness with which, acting within the confines of autogenous patterns alone, it is able to specify behavior" (1962: 729). Human activities and feelings are organized, not by biology directly, but by the interaction of biological propensities and those various and culture-specific expectations, plans, and symbols that coordinate our actions and so permit our species to survive. The implication of such an argument for understanding human sex roles is that biological differences between the sexes may not have necessary social and behavioral implications. What is male and what is female will depend upon interpretations of biology that are associated with any culture's mode of life.

Recent investigations of the biological bases of human behavior encourage a similar conclusion. The evidence from primate studies and from examinations of human infants, adult hormones, and the behavior of hermaphrodites and others who have been called "sexual anomalies" (Hutt, 1972; Money and Ehrhardt, 1972) all points to the conclusion that biology constrains but does not determine the behavior of the sexes, and that differences between human males and females reflect an interaction between our physical constitutions and our patterns of social life. So, for example, whereas early theorists sought the origins of human sex roles, and even of the modern Western family, in the activities of certain primates, many researchers today emphasize that primate species differ with respect to extent of sexual dimorphism, male-dominance behavior, aggression, and the like. What is more, the behavior of the sexes within even a single primate species (Rowell, 1972) has been shown to vary from expressions of dominance to relatively egalitarian relations, depending on the environment in which a population is observed. In other words, whatever the biological determinants of their behavior, primates, like humans, seem to have an impressive capacity to adopt new forms of social relationships in new social and physical worlds.

In a similar vein, recent studies of human hormones and of sexually

dimorphic patterns of behavior indicate, first, that sex-linked behavioral differences are of a quantitative rather than a qualitative nature, and second, that hormonal levels (which are supposed to govern behaviors) themselves are highly sensitive to changes in one's social environment. In psychological testing, many males behave "like females," and on several measures there is more variation in the performances and capacities of a single sex than there is between the two (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Again, recent evidence that stressful contexts lead to a decrease in testosterone suggests that social contexts and contextually induced behaviors influence the appearance of hormones, rather than the reverse (Kreuz et al., 1972).

In other words, there seems to be increasing evidence that the behavioral possibilities of the sexes are rich and variable, and that even primates adopt new patterns of behavior when confronted with new environments. That human males and females have fixed, significant, and necessarily distinct behavioral propensities is far from clear. Just as foot binding in traditional China created women who were constitutionally incapable of certain kinds of physical exertion, so it seems likely that our culturally specified and different ways of acting themselves influence our physical lives. In short, although we are certain that biological studies will illuminate our understanding of the sexes, we feel that the issues are too complex for definitive treatment in this volume, and furthermore, that they do not *determine* the relations and evaluations of the sexes in contemporary forms of social life.

One other account of the origins of sexual asymmetry deserves our attention. This is the notion that the earliest forms of human society found it adaptive to differentiate the activities of men and women, giving those of men a special value, and that this early adaptation has become part of the sociocultural inheritance of our species. Contemporary evolutionary theorists, perhaps in reaction to earlier ideas of female dominance, have suggested that human social existence originated in the cooperative activities of early men, who were hunters.

The argument has been that hunting large animals demands the coordinated efforts of several individuals, and because it often involves danger and extensive travel, it tends to exclude women, who must produce and care for children, and so are constrained in their movements. A related argument is that male strength and size dictated that men rather than women would adopt the responsibility for intergroup aggression and defense. Hunting, a specifically male activity, is seen as a creative turning point in human evolution; it demanded the first forms of social cooperation and it encouraged the invention of our first "artistic" tools. Washburn and Lancaster sum up the implications of hunt-

ing by stating, "In a very real sense our intellect, interests, emotions, and basic social life—all are evolutionary products of the success of the hunting adaptation" (1968: 293).

Whereas those who view evolution in terms of Man the Hunter are aware of the probable importance of female gathering in early social life, they assign the latter only secondary importance. More recently, Linton (1973) has explored the role of Woman the Gatherer and, in redressing the balance, has noted that women contribute the bulk of the diet in contemporary hunting-gathering populations, that small-game hunting practiced by both sexes may have preceded the advent of big-game hunting, and that some early tools (in addition to containers not preserved in the archaeological record) may have been aids in gathering. She also speculates that gathering and the socialization of children, both women's activities, required cooperative and communicative skills as complex as those involved in hunting, and so would have had an important impact on the creation of early social and cultural patterns.

This second reconstruction (further developed in recent work by Tanner and Zihlman, n.d.) emphasizes the role of women as well as that of men, and seems preferable to the Man the Hunter version of human evolution; but whatever account one chooses, it is clear that our knowledge of early human social forms remains speculative. Although it seems likely that the development of big-game hunting and warfare promoted an ethic of male dominance, it is difficult to see why biases associated with man's earliest adaptations should remain with us today. The question then becomes: why, if our social worlds are so different from those of our ancestors, has the relation of the sexes continued to be asymmetrical, and how is it that social groups, which change radically through time, continue to produce and reproduce a social order dominated by men?

This is the question underlying the first three essays in this collection. Each begins with the observation that women everywhere lactate and give birth to children, and are therefore likely to be associated with child rearing and the responsibilities of the home. All three authors argue that the connection between a woman's reproductive system and her domestic role, obvious as it may seem, is not a necessary one; biological factors may make certain sociocultural arrangements highly likely, but with changes in technology, population size, ideas, and aspirations, our social order can change. What is significant, these papers argue, is that insofar as woman is universally defined in terms of a largely maternal and domestic role, we can account for her universal subordination. Elaborations of her reproductive functions shape her

social role and her psychology; they color her cultural definition; and they permit us to understand the perpetuation of woman's status without seeing her subordination as entirely determined by her biological propensities or her evolutionary heritage.

Rosaldo argues that an emphasis on woman's maternal role leads to a universal opposition between "domestic" and "public" roles that is necessarily asymmetrical; women, confined to the domestic sphere, do not have access to the sorts of authority, prestige, and cultural value that are the prerogatives of men. She suggests further that, given this imbalance, the exercise of power by women is often seen as illegitimate, and that the avenues by which women gain prestige and a sense of value are shaped and often limited by their association with the domestic world.

Chodorow's paper explores the implications of woman's maternal role for the development of personality in young children. Sex-linked personality differences, she argues, are often the unintentional consequence of the fact that women have the primary responsibility for raising children of both sexes. A mother responds in different ways to her infant sons and daughters, and as they mature, they react differently to her. For the boy, who often has little personal knowledge of adult males and their activities, manhood is typically learned as an abstract set of rights and duties, and its attainment is made possible through an emotional rejection of his mother and the woman's world. Young girls, by contrast, follow in their mother's footsteps and become "little women." Through the ways in which a girl experiences her ties with her mother and learns to deal with the interpersonal demands of the family, feminine personality comes to be founded on relation and connection to other people, in contrast to masculine personality, which seems based on a denial of relation and dependence.

Finally, Ortner shows how the facts of female biology, woman's domestic role, and the so-called "feminine personality" combine to encourage cultural definitions of the female that tend to be degrading. Women, who are excluded from cultural projects of transcendence, and limited to an existence largely dictated by their biology, come to be seen as more "natural" and less "cultural" than men. Ortner takes care to emphasize that this ideology involves arbitrary, and not necessary, connections between women's bodily functions and "nature," which are in turn negatively rather than positively evaluated. In other words, the ease of an association between woman and nonhuman nature provides a cultural rationale for female subordination; woman's biology, social role, and personality encourage cultures to define her as "closer



to nature" than man, hence to be subordinated, controlled, and manipulated in the service of "culture's" ends. In short, the three papers speak from a common position in spelling out the ways in which woman's social functions—and in particular her role in child care and reproduction—combine to make women universally the "second sex."

But an account of the factors that contribute everywhere to sexual asymmetry is necessarily incomplete if it leads us to ignore the manifold ways in which women in different social systems achieve power and a sense of personal value. The remaining papers in this collection consider the nature, implications, and extent of female power; they establish that women's role in social processes is far greater than has previously been recognized; and they ask how particular social structures and ideologies enhance or undermine women's attempts to shape and find meanings in their lives.

Because men everywhere tend to have more prestige than women, and because men are usually associated with social roles of dominance and authority, most previous descriptions of social processes have treated women as being theoretically uninteresting. Women who exercise power are seen as deviants, manipulators, or, at best, exceptions. And women's goals and ideologies are assumed to be coordinate with those of men. The papers in the second part of this collection challenge these assumptions from a number of perspectives; the questions they raise provide a direction for future studies of women, and indicate the theoretical importance of such studies for our general understanding of human social life.

To begin with, several papers argue that women, like men, are social actors who work in structured ways to achieve desired ends. Although the formal authority structure of a society may declare that women are impotent and irrelevant, close attention to women's strategies and motives, to the sorts of choices made by women, to the relationships they establish, and to the ends they achieve indicates that even in situations of overt sex role asymmetry women have a good deal more power than conventional theorists have assumed. Collier, for example, argues that it is useful to view women as political strategists who use the resources available to them in support of interests often opposed to those of men. Women's strategies may appear to be deviant and disruptive, yet they are nonetheless important components of the actual processes by which social life proceeds. By causing what have been called domestic tragedies, by seeking divorces, or by using their sons' loyalty and allegiance to undermine family or lineage solidarity, women act in rational ways to achieve personally desired goals. From the point of view of dominant

norms, such procedures may appear to be idiosyncratic, disruptive, unimportant, or undesirable, but social scientists who ignore them can expect to produce only a partial account of the structure and processes of different forms of social life.

Women's strategies are also the subject of a number of other papers. Lamphere develops a theory of the ways in which structural features of a society interact with women's goals to produce different sorts of alignments among women in the domestic sphere. Women's strategies are directly related to the power structure of the family. Where power and authority are in the hands of men, women work to influence them, and come into conflict with each other. Where authority is shared by men and women in the family, women do not need to play the game of subtle influence and "behind-the-scenes" manipulation; in such societies, women are able to form strong cooperative ties with their female kin and other women in carrying out everyday activities.

Also focusing on domestic relationships, Stack suggests that a characterization of the families of American urban Blacks as matrifocal is static and misleading; instead, she views women as strategists and as resilient social actors who cope with the problems of poverty, unemployment, and oppression in their everyday lives. The personal histories of a number of Black women in a Midwestern urban area illustrate vividly the ways in which women form alliances and rely on an enduring network of kin among whom goods and services are exchanged.

Women's domestic strategies and power may be reinforced by a strong ideology that stresses the position of women in the family. Tanner suggests that matrifocal organization does not depend on the notion of the absent father, but on the culturally valued position of the mother and her effective role as a decision maker. By examining family structure in several Indonesian societies and among the Ibo of Nigeria, she suggests that matrifocality is not a consequence of the kinship system per se—whether bilateral, matrilineal, or patrilineal—but of the cultural definitions and the society-wide structure of male and female roles. This allows Tanner to offer an alternative view of Black urban family structure that focuses, not on the marginal position of Black men, but on the strong role of Black women.

Wolf, in her paper on women in China, does not confine her discussion to the realm of the rural, patrilocal domestic group, but also examines women's strategies in the community as a whole. She shows how women coped with their low status as brides in families dominated by men, how they came to influence their husbands and sons indirectly, and how they developed subtle interpersonal skills through socializing

children, gossiping with the women's community, and manipulating men through their roles as soul raisers. She then uses her analysis to interpret the positions women were able to assume in a situation of revolutionary change.

Finally, Hoffer treats an example of an African society in which women can become heads of secret societies and even paramount chiefs. Using the case of Madam Yoko, a nineteenth-century Mende female chief, Hoffer examines the sorts of political strategies by which women may obtain real political power. In an era of increasing British colonial hegemony, Madam Yoko was able to make politically astute marriages, become a senior wife, and succeed to her deceased husband's position as paramount chief. Once she had achieved power, she was able to exercise it by using her sex to advantage. Men consolidated political power through marriage alliances; Madam Yoko took wards and married them to men in other lineages, creating alliances in two directions (i.e. with the kin of the ward and with those of the prospective groom). Hoffer's analysis reveals the ways in which women can act as men in a political system, but it also shows how a woman may be able to manipulate political relationships in ways not available to male officeholders.

The papers we have been discussing thus far examine the forms and quality of women's strategies and powers. In doing so they are consistent with recent theoretical developments in anthropology. Theorists like Barth (1959), Leach (1954), and more recently Firth (1962) and Bailey (1969) have argued against static descriptions of social structures that ignore the processes of social and political action through which these structures are produced. By showing that women as well as men are social actors whose goals and strategies are intrinsic to the processes of social life, the papers here extend the work of these theorists into a new area, challenging accepted views of social order and directing our attention to previously unrecognized methods by which the social world is shaped.

Another kind of question, addressed implicitly in some of the papers we have already mentioned (e.g. Tanner, Hoffer), is an explicit focus of several comparative analyses. These ask: What are the factors determining women's social status? How can we account for differences in women's position across societies? Sanday's paper is a statistical treatment of cross-cultural variations in women's status. Arguing that reproduction, subsistence, and defense are crucial aspects of any society's survival, and in particular that women's reproductive role may limit their participation in defense, she suggests that women's contribution to subsistence is a crucial variable in determining their status. In societies where

the fruits of production are controlled by men, women may produce most or none of the subsistence goods, but in either case have low status. Women's status, Sanday finds, is highest in those societies where their contribution to subsistence is relatively equivalent to that of men. There women tend to control crucial economic resources, a situation that may lead either to antagonism between the sexes or to recognition of women in ritual and religious spheres.

Sacks, too, suggests that it is *control* of production rather than the sheer amount of foodstuffs produced by women that determines female status. She reinterprets Engels's theory of the origin of the family and private property, emphasizing the historical dynamic by which women are transformed from equal members of society (or social adults) into dependent wives and wards. By examining data from four African societies, she finds that as men become more involved in production for exchange (rather than for immediate use), women's work becomes more domesticated, and women's status correspondingly declines. A reversal of this process, she suggests, is possible only when private domestic work becomes socially valued public work; only when production, consumption, child rearing, and economic decision making all take place in a single sphere will women become the full equals of men.

Leis uses a controlled comparison of two related West African communities in an attempt to identify those features of economy and social structure (such as residence patterns, kinship organization, polygyny, and marriage payments) that encourage or inhibit the formation of women's associations; these, in one community but not the other, provide women with a collective basis for the expression of public power.

Denich's paper, comparing pastoral and agricultural societies in the Balkans, also focuses on the importance of economic and ecological factors in determining women's status. Essentially, she argues that the social adaptations appropriate to a pastoral way of life require solidarity among the male members of a cooperative kin group; women in such a situation are seen as socially disruptive, and much collective effort goes into limiting a woman's effective sphere of power. In agricultural groups, by contrast, small families are the units of productive labor, and there is correspondingly less emphasis on male solidarity at the expense of women, and more emphasis on the cooperation of husbands and wives.

A third kind of question is raised in the three remaining papers. These concentrate on the ways in which cultural ideologies impinge upon women and are used to keep women in their place. Bamberger shows how, in a number of South American societies, myths that tell of women's mythic dominance and future capitulation to masculine rule

are used by men to assert their independence from their mothers, to legitimize the present fact of male authority, and to tell women that their ability to exercise power was found wanting in the past and has no place in the future of the group.

Paul and O'Laughlin, working from very different theoretical assumptions, both show how cultural expressions of the vulnerability and mystery of women's reproductive functions give an aura of nature and necessity to women's secondary status. Paul, in her analysis of women's conceptions of their bodies in a Guatemalan community, argues that ideas about the body have two aspects: in work the body is competent and skillful; in sex and reproduction it is changeable, mysterious, and a source of danger. Sex, then, provides a cultural rationale for female subordination; at the same time, the very mystery of a woman's body unites her to conceptions of the cosmos, providing grounds for solidarity with other women, and powers that may be threatening to men.

O'Laughlin's paper, the last in this collection, uses a Marxist framework to explore sexual asymmetry among the Mbum Kpau of Tchad. The key to women's standing in this group lies not in their productive contribution, which equals that of men, but in the ways in which a male lineage organization appropriates surpluses in order to purchase and control the reproductive potential of new wives. Through the complexities of bridewealth payments, women are alienated from their own reproduction; food taboos, whose violation causes reproductive failure, provide a cultural mediation of asymmetries in Mbum society.

Taken together, the papers in this collection do a number of things. First, by providing a critical analysis of the universality of women's subordination, they suggest that sexual asymmetry is not a necessary condition of human societies but a cultural product accessible to change. Second, they show that the observation of sexual asymmetry itself means different things in different places, that women vary in their social roles and powers, their public status, and their cultural definitions, and that the nature, quality, and social significance of women's activities are far more varied and interesting than has often been assumed. Third, the papers in this collection suggest that variations in women's status and power can be accounted for by particular social and economic factors, one important variable being women's contributions to subsistence and their control over those contributions. Finally, they present a challenge to future thinking in anthropology: by focusing on women's roles and actions, they cast a new light on old assumptions about the nature of human society, and they suggest rich fields for future inquiry and research.

We feel that this collection is in many respects only a beginning, but that it has implications both for thinking about ourselves as women and for effecting the kinds of change necessary if women are to realize their hopes and aspirations for an egalitarian world. Although the papers here do not, on the whole, address questions concerning female roles today, they do, in attempting to elucidate a theory of women's secondary status, offer tentative suggestions for the future. If, as we suggest here, women's position is not biologically determined, then it is a cultural product that can be altered. To say that women's secondary status is universal is not to say that it is necessary or right. On the contrary. Biology dictates that women lactate and bear children. But the social and cultural consequences of this fact—that women have been seen as wives, and more particularly as mothers; that their activities have been limited by the responsibilities of child care; that their lives have been defined in terms of reproductive functions; and that their personalities have been shaped by ties with "mothers," who in turn are women—all of these are human products that we feel account for women's secondary status; we suggest, moreover, that they are subject to, and accessible to, change. Surely, the diversity of human cultures and the evidence of societies in which women have achieved considerable recognition and social status might make us optimistic about the possibility of realizing sexual equality in our world today.

The anthropological record provides us with no simple model. Sexual differentiation and sex-role asymmetry seem to have been present in all human societies yet known. Nature, while not dictating women's status, has in the past provided both the conditions and the rationale for female subordination. But, we would argue, just as the particulars of different forms of social and cultural organization have provided women in different places with very different powers and possibilities, so our contemporary situation renders any "natural" ranking or differentiation of the sexes altogether obsolete. What we think of as "men's work" can today be performed by women, and, correspondingly, "women's work" can be performed by men. Change must proceed in two directions. To begin, it would seem imperative to integrate men into the domestic sphere, giving them an opportunity to share in the socialization of children as well as in the more mundane domestic tasks. What is more, the cross-cultural evidence of the importance of female participation in, and control of, the products of economic production indicates that women's status will be elevated only when they participate equally with men in the public world of work.

Before the details of such proposals could be articulated for our own

complex society, it would be necessary to go further than we have here in spelling out the role of social class and political hierarchy in female subordination, in challenging a capitalist economic system in which women form a pool of relatively underpaid and surplus labor, and in asking how work and economic success might themselves be redefined. A society in which the sexes are truly equal will have to be a society in which the very terms of our descriptions—power, authority, politics, productivity—forged in order to account for the realities of male-dominated social systems, become irrelevant or change their sense. Lacking models, we cannot say what such a society would be like.

What we *can* do is give direction to our actions, demand public recognition and public power, and, finally, challenge all the complex stereotypes that assume women to be “naturally” what, today, they are. Our own culture (and probably all others) is characterized by an ideology dictating that women’s lives are relatively uninteresting; this is a fact that most of social science has failed to examine or explain. By refocusing our attention, then, we are challenging old assumptions. By treating women’s lives everywhere as interesting and problematic, we hope to loosen the hold of stereotypes that have, unfortunately, shaped our own lives. Much as the writings of Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf (among others) have shown that the “insignificant” details of domestic life can be the stuff of novels, we hope to begin, on another level, to alter our assumptions about the sexes by demonstrating the sociological interest and significance of lives previously ignored.

The papers that follow represent a first step in this direction. In demonstrating the importance of women’s lives for our understanding of the human record, they point the way to new thinking in social science. And, in touching on issues of human significance universally, they suggest directions for any future worlds we might create.