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COLLECTIVE IMAGES OF GENDER

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In the social sciences to date, the investigation of gender, and of the roles and status associated with it, has been largely confined to the analysis of women's roles and status, and the ways in which they relate to men's roles. Evidence from such research indicates wide variation in the status of women in different societies, even among those which are comparable in terms of such criteria as the level of economic development or the level of modernisation. These variations are rooted in underlying cultural and social factors, of which *collective images of gender* form an important part. There is, consequently, a growing realisation of the need to expand the study of gender images to include collective images as they apply to men.

The term 'image' refers to notions and concepts about what men and women are, to the cultural meanings assigned to male and female gender. Collective images may be *institutionalized* at different levels of national cultures (in laws, constitutions, educational curricula, inter alia), or may be less formal, less articulated, yet persuasive beliefs, which according to Williams, form part of the world view of a social group or class (Williams, 1981: 28).

Collective institutionalized images have been referred to by Williams, in his discussion of ideology, as 'organized beliefs', which are both formal and conscious. The concept has also been specifically used in relation to gender, although the language of the discussion has varied considerably. Ortner & Whitehead have referred to the same concept as 'sexual meanings': the ways in which gender and sexuality are conceptualized in different cultures. Thus sex, both in the sense of gender, and in the sense in which it pertains to the

erotic, is considered as a symbol to which is attributed culturally variable meanings (Ortner & Whitehead, 1981). Strathern, in discussing the activity of "stereotype-making", uses the concept of 'gender constructs' to refer to the notions about the similarities and differences between the sexes. She stresses that gender classes are not just obvious developments on biological sex-differences: there is an infinite variety of ideologies and logic by which such ideas are developed. She considers these classes as

empty moulds into which all kind of notions are poured. What the moulds provide is the outline structure of contrast and relationship (Strathern, 1976: 55).

Gender ideology reflects the society and provides a way of thinking about social activities, as well as a mirror in which the society can see itself. Shirley Ardener talks about 'models of women' as the set of ideas which together represent women in the minds of those who have generated the model. Members of a group, while each, no doubt, perceiving the world in a unique way, nevertheless share some fundamental ideas which go to form a common model of society, or a common model of its components (Ardener, 1975). Ann Oakley refers to the idea of collective images of gender as 'cultural artifacts which separate the world of girls from that of boys' (Oakley, 1981). Smock discusses the values, norms, attitudes and ideals infusing each society, which translate the physical underpinnings of sexual distinctions into socially relevant categories of masculine and feminine (Smock, 1977). The definition of what it means to be female or male in a given culture provides institutionalized modes of action, relationships and groupings which link the individual to the society. It is clear from the foregoing, that an understanding of the nature and sources of collective institutionalized images of gender is central to the analysis of the different roles played by men and women cross-culturally.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IMAGES

The concept of collective images must be distinguished from that of individual images, usually referred to as sex-role stereotypes and attitudes. Cross-national comparisons of the position or role of women in particular are often based on national averages for such variables as the importance attributed to gender equality, or the acceptance of male dominance. There may be a close relationship between the distribution of individual attitudes and collective gender images, and indeed they may fully overlap, but the extent to which they correspond to each other is an empirical question, as the con-

cepts refer to fundamentally different phenomena (cf Heintz's contribution to this workshop). The aggregation of individual sex-role stereotypes and attitudes regarding gender behaviour is a construct of social science. As such, they are not objectified in the same way as collective, institutionalised images, which can be seen in the cultural horizon of a society, and exist independently of individual consciousness as part of the society's symbolic universe (e. g. in laws, literature, folklore). The concept of collective images of men and women, as used here, thus refers to images of men and women which are *institutionalized* at different levels of national cultures. These institutionalised images are 'objectified' in the sense that they leave a trace, and are independent of individual members of society. They form part of the framework within which individuals live out their lives and bestow meaning on the social environment. Gender, in this approach, is seen as a symbol or set of symbols whose meanings vary between cultures.

Collective images of gender have both cognitive and normative elements. *Cognitive* images of gender relate to beliefs about the nature of men and women e. g. that men are aggressive, dominant, rational, competitive, while women are intuitive, emotional, passive and submissive. Sociological and psychological theories are prime propagators of such images, which are diffused to other areas of society, and underlie patterns of behaviour and of treatment of individuals who do not fit into the accepted collective image (Baker, 1980; Shields, 1982; Lambert, 1978; Lowe, 1978). *Normative* images refer to ideas about what women and men *should be or should do* – for example, ideas about the division of labour within marriage, institutionalized in the marriage laws and concisely expressed in the popular proverb: "a woman's place is in the home", and the corresponding idea of man as breadwinner. These ideas are incorporated in laws, regulations, procedural rules of professional associations, as well as in theories about what a 'normal' woman or man is and does, or what a 'sick' man or woman must do to become 'normal' again.

DIMENSIONS OF GENDER IMAGES

The study of a topic as broad and general as the collective, institutionalized images of men and women requires the identification of theoretically relevant dimensions of these images. In this context, three dimensions are considered to be of primary importance: differentiation of male and female character, relations between men and women, and the role sets of men and women.

Differentiation of Male and Female Character

The first analytically relevant dimension refers to the degree of ascription present in the cultural conceptions of men and women. Images may be classified according to whether women and men are represented as belonging to *essentially* opposite or antagonistic categories of human beings. The questions to be answered here deal with the extent to which certain psychological and social traits of individuals are classified as either 'male' or 'female', and whether the explanations for such a categorization are circular in that the categories 'man' or 'woman' are used to explain the behaviour of individual actors. A distinction can thus be made between polarized and androgenous gender images in national culture. Polarized images would typically stress biological gender dimorphism (for example: hormonal processes, size, physical abilities), cognitive differences (for instance: spatial ability, IQ), and emotional gender dimorphism (aggressivity, self-esteem). Androgenous images, at the other end of the spectrum, would be expected to portray men and women such that interpersonal variation of the qualities mentioned above is not primarily associated with gender. These images emphasize the cultural environment and structural factors in the explanation of gender differences.

In addition to the above, the extent to which cultural gender images are relational or not must be examined. Relational images of one gender make reference to the other gender or to a common scale on which both genders are ranked (as in 'the weaker sex'). It can be hypothesized, for example, that relational definitions are more frequent in the case of women than of men. Non-relational images of woman have certainly become more prevalent, however, in the wake of the new women's movement. The progressive female subculture has attempted to replace or modify existing images of both genders in the world of men. Autonomous images can thus be interpreted as the result of cultural conflict, in which the formerly oppressed culture is trying to redefine the symbolic world in its own terms — that is, without referring to the dominant culture, even in the form of negation. Such definitions are based on the assumption that a meaningful comparison between the genders is not possible. Some relational definitions of men have emerged from the value change for which there has been evidence, of late, in many European countries. For example, it is nowadays sometimes seen as a 'weakness' that men do not show or are unable to show, emotions as much as women.

Relations between Men and Women

Collective images are not restricted to ideas about the nature of men and women, and the roles they should play. They also deal with the topic of male-female relations. The concepts of *status* (the power aspect of relations) and *legitimation* (the prestige aspect of relations) are central to an analysis of this dimension of collective gender images. Smock has postulated three types of cultural interpretation of the kinds of relationship considered possible and desirable between women and men, on the basis of empirical findings in different cultures (Smock, 1977). Each broad category is based on a way of conceptualising sex-differences.

1. In the first type, sex-differencies are emphasised but not ranked. This interpretation is often linked to social separation and complementary roles — men and women go separate ways, and neither is subordinate to the other. Looked at from a sociological point of view, women and men can be said to have unequal status but equal legitimation in this type of collective image. Ideal relations between them are '*romantic*': men and women are considered to be of equal worth, but different. This type of gender image has been prevalent in Western societies up to recently, and still pervades the institutional structures of many societies, even though a shift away from it has been gathering speed. The roots of this type of image lie in the conception of romantic love and the bourgeois ideal of marriage. The idea of 'equality in difference' allows men and women, at least theoretically, to adhere to their 'natural' character, without at the same time becoming the object of exploitation, or of a relationship of dependency.
2. In a further type, sex-differencies are emphasised and the traits associated with males are accorded superiority. Each gender is conceptualised as having polar opposite "natures". Such collective images of relations between the sexes are usually classified as *traditional*, and/or *patriarchal* in the basic sense of the word. The relations themselves are defined by unequal status and unequal legitimation. The images imply a categorical inferiority of women. 'Natural', ascribed differences between men and women in terms of status and prestige are assumed. The relationship between men and women is modelled on that between parents and children. In the extreme version of this interpretation, male and female spheres are clearly differentiated and joint socializing and activities are illegitimate.

3. In the third type, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in developed western nations, minimal attention is paid to sex-differences and the likelihood of shared roles is greater. The collective images which prevail in such societies can be classified as *egalitarian*. Gender relations are characterised by equal status and legitimation (equal social value) of the two genders. In reality, this type is often implemented in the form of modified male superiority: in some spheres, males and females are considered to be relatively equal, while in others, traits considered to be characteristic of males are accorded higher social value.

Role Sets of Men and Women

The third dimension of gender images which is of relevance here refers to the societally defined role sets of both genders. The question to be answered, in this case, refers to the extent to which the differentiation of the private, familial sphere from the public domain coincides with the sex-based division of labour. That is, to what extent are female roles linked to the production of familial and household goods, while male roles serve the production of public goods (power and income). Conceptually, the two parameters are independent, and it would be expected that a sharp segregation of familial and public domains contributes to the societal division of labour on the basis of sex. Compared to the nineteenth century, the sex-based division of labour has become less clearcut in Western societies, reflecting the secular increase in female labour force participation, while the public and private spheres have remained largely separate, both in terms of institutional structures and cultural values. Despite the growing incidence of dual roles, there are, as yet, no collective images of women which positively integrate both types of role, and those which do so in the case of men are restricted to the 'fatherhood' aspect of the domestic role.

MALE BIAS IN COLLECTIVE IMAGES OF GENDER

The study of collective institutionalised images of gender raises the question of who actually *produces* these images, whose model of the world do they belong to or derive from. Logically, those which are institutionalised and thus 'objectified' in a society are the products of the dominant classes

in the society, whether these be seen in terms of social classes or of gender groups. Gender images, in this way of looking at things, could then be described as the ideas which men hold about women in the society, and which come to be accepted by many (if not all) women also. These images make reality intelligible, but if they are constructed on the basis of the experience of only one group in society (in this case, men) the images will only reflect reality from their point of view. The problem of what happens to the group which does not produce the images, but to whom the images relate, has been discussed at length by Ardener as that of 'muted groups' (Ardener, E. 1975). This problem has two aspects: on the one hand, it has to do with the models used by social scientists in their attempts to understand a society: these models of society tend to be derived from the male portion of that society, ignoring the existence at a deeper level of an autonomous female view. On the other hand, it has to do with the muted groups themselves: the extent to which they adopt the male-produced images of the world and of themselves, and the extent to which they are conscious of their own perceptions. Male models of society, according to Ardener, accommodate women only by making certain assumptions that ignore or hold constant elements that would contradict these models. The nature of the dominant structure is such that women are rendered inarticulate by it. The dominant structure is articulated in terms of a male world-position. Those who are not in the male world-position are 'muted'. Muted groups do not form part of the dominant communicative system of the society – expressed through the dominant ideology. The muted structures are 'there' but cannot be realized in terms of the dominant structure. Where society is defined by men, there are elements of women which do not fit that definition. Some aspects of women's view often tend to remain inarticulated, as they cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant ideology. Whether such 'muted' structures always exist is seen here as an empirical question, rather than a foregone conclusion. Strathern postulates that some societies may yield female as well as male models of the world, but in others, women may simply live in the shadow, or shelter of men's structures. Besides the possibility of female models of the world, which the concept of muted groups raises, collective images can be expected to vary between regions, classes, as well as between official and mass versions.

INDIVIDUALIZATION PROCESS AND GENDER IMAGES

Our starting point for the explanation of national difference in gender images is the observation that modern societies are characterized by a process of individualization, which varies cross-culturally in scope and speed. The indi-

vidual is increasingly regarded as the only valued social unit and the sole source of social legitimation. In the course of this modern development, kin groups, organizations and the state come to act solely for and on behalf of the individual (Meyer & al., 1981; Beck, 1983).

This process of cultural individualization is closely linked, firstly, to the rise of the nation state, with its emphasis on the citizen, and secondly, to the emergence of the welfare state. Bureaucratic action is here centred around the individual, who needs care, protection and development, and whose 'happiness' must be guaranteed by the state. Even state activities which serve organizational or collective purposes (such as defense) are increasingly legitimated with reference to the welfare of the individual actor.

Analytically, two aspects of this individualization process can be distinguished. The first can be described as a secular increase in societal membership rights (including the right to protection), the second as a movement towards increasingly complex conceptions of the individual. The two aspects reinforce each other: on the one hand, the notions of increased complexity (e. g. the intellectual capacity to do business) call for the granting of certain legal titles or procedural rights to everybody; on the other hand, viewing former dependent or muted groups as full members facilitates the ascription of capacities considered necessary for membership (e. g. citizens have to be fairly rational or wise), thus adding to the number of basic capacities or dispositions ascribed to all individuals (Held & al., 1983).

Gender is a crucial variable in the process of culturel individualization. Up to present, women have not been bestowed with full personhood status either with regard to membership rights or with regard to the assumed complexity of the individual. The public domain which emerged as a result of the bourgeois revolution or emancipation during the late 18th and early 19th centuries (i. e. the re-public in the widest sense) was exclusively a male sphere, and the citizen, almost by definition, a male character. We can thus ask whether, to what degree and how, over the past two centuries, women have been incorporated into the public sphere.

A tentative distinction can be made between three modes of women's incorporation, which may each be regarded as determinants of gender images. The first mode of incorporation simply involves the expansion of the cultural conception of the individual to include *all* members of society. In legal terms, the principle of equality before the law is gradually applied to categories of actors who did not formerly qualify for full personhood status. At the level of discourse, gender and other ascribed characteristics become increasingly irrelevant in the relationship between the state and the individual. A second

mode of incorporation occurs through female pressure groups. Women (represented by women's organizations or by female subunits *within* male organizations), participate in the public domain like other corporate groups (for example, groups based on regional or occupational interests). They usually operate in a similar manner — by lobbying, or by token rather than proportional representation (Held & Levy, 1983). But unlike other pressure groups, women do not constitute a relatively homogenous social category. This means that female pressure groups will stress cultural rather than structural aspects of women's situation and will tend to focus on the lowest common denominator of 'female' problems. These latter are frequently defined in ascribed, naturalist terms. The third form of incorporation may be based on membership in a family or household. Here, women's reproduction and socialization capacities are emphasized. The production of family values is directly linked to the welfare of the state. Conversely, the state protects domestic production — it guarantees some minimal standards of (family) life rather than individual rights.

The three modes of incorporation are not mutually exclusive, and national political cultures may exhibit elements of each to varying degrees. In addition, different modes may predominate at different levels of state activity, or in different sectors of the public domain. Furthermore, social change and redefinitions which take place within the political culture may completely transform the issue of women's incorporation. Such changes may involve the extension of political culture, as well as its content and style. For example, revolutionary and liberationist movements have often attempted to break down the divisions between the public, political domain of men, and the private, familial world of women, by declaring family issues to be political problems. A more recent example is the institutionalization of post-industrial values, such as the quality of life, or environmental balance, which are considered closer to feminine values. This idea is developed in some of the blueprints for an ecologically balanced society and for world peace (for instance, by the Peace movement). Because women are assumed to be more communicative and less competitive than men, and because they are traditionally portrayed as guardians of nature, a 'feminization' of political culture is considered crucial for the survival of human society.

The two aspects of the individualization process outlined above — the increase in the assumed complexity and capacities of the individual, and the extension of membership rights both in scope and in coverage — may have conflicting implications for institutionalized gender images in modern society. Firstly, with the growing centrality of the individual in Western ontology, the individual's motives, needs and desires come to be defined in increasingly abstract terms (Meyer & al, 1981), as reflected, for instance, in the

models of homo economicus and homo sociologicus. The emergence of specific personality types has come to be seen as the result of active, conscious efforts on the part firstly of the socializers, and secondly of the individuals themselves. Thus, differentiation on the basis of 'natural' differences, such as age and gender, is regarded as highly irrational or at least suspicious. In the light of the increasingly sophisticated concept of the individual, a development towards less polarized, more androgenous collective images of gender can be expected. Gender differentiation based on nature becomes illegitimate. According to this line of reasoning, nature itself may be seen as an obstacle to the achievement of full gender equality, full justice, and freedom of the individual. The political actions derived from this perspective are directed at overcoming 'natural' barriers, either by showing (e. g. through social science research) that no such barriers 'actually' exist (thus adding to the complexity and abstractness of the individual), or by rendering given gender differences obsolete through technical arrangements or social engineering. An apt illustration of the latter are social arrangements and medical technologies which 'free' women from the reproductive tasks usually seen as the key determinants of the social differentiation of gender.

Secondly, the other aspect of the individualization process — the extension, in both scope and coverage, of membership rights — inevitably leads to debates about the 'true' needs of the individual and their satisfaction in modern society. This question must be distinguished from that of who (the state, markets, or self-help associations) should or could best satisfy these needs. Individuals are increasingly entitled not only to political membership, to due process and social welfare, but also to 'quality of life' goods: that is, to happiness in general. This requires an essential definition of the individual, stripped of social constructs. The search for a culture-free concept of the individual, and the related concern about over-socialization or manipulation, have been major problems in Western history (Meyer, forthcoming). One of the classic answers has been to introduce nature as a frame of reference in the discussion. For instance, many modern psychological theories stress the importance of bodily experiences (such as birth trauma) as both causes of and therapies for psychic disorders. With regard to gender, this reference to nature may once again legitimize polarized images of women and men, leading to a new emphasis on 'true' womanhood and manhood. Thus, in terms of the extension of membership rights, it is not 'nature' itself, but rather social constraints which have to be overcome so that the full potential of *female* and *male* individuals can be 'realized'.

It may be hypothesized that the increased saliency of the individual will lead to the coexistence of, and oscillations between polarized and androgenous concepts of gender. With regard to the public identity of actors,

androgenous images may be stressed and fashionable, while with regard to the self, gender images may be determined by concepts of 'true' womanhood, or (less frequently) 'true' manhood. The contradiction between the two legitimating systems are logical rather than psychological in nature, thus making it more difficult to combine elements of both in highly institutionalized, collective gender images, than in individual images. Assuming that the two types of gender image are to some extent mutually exclusive, the question arises as to the structural conditions leading to the predominance of one or the other form of gender legitimation in national societies. Furthermore, it may be asked whether the modes of women's incorporation outlined above have any relationship to the type of gender legitimation prevalent in a society. While these questions can only be raised, and not answered, here some speculative conclusions may be in order. With regard to the first question, it may be hypothesized that relatively polarized gender images ('true nature' argument) will predominate in societies where the concept of the individual actor is shaped by the bureaucratic man — i. e. where public identity and self are more or less decoupled (Meyer, forthcoming). In cultures where markets are emphasized, and the individual is thus seen more as a decision-maker (consumer, entrepreneur), and where wishes and tastes are, consequently, part of the public identity, it may be expected that the legitimating system will be more abstract, and gender images less naturalistic. Accordingly, in relation to the second question, it may be expected that the 'liberal' mode of the incorporation of women (and of dependents in general) is associated with abstract, androgenous concepts of gender, while incorporation through membership in households or families is clearly compatible with a naturalist view of gender.

