



On Female Culture an Attempt to Formulate a Theory of Women's Solidarity and Action

Author(s): Berit Ås

Source: *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 18, No. 2/3 (1975), pp. 142-161

Published by: [Sage Publications, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4194058>

Accessed: 28/05/2014 07:40

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Sage Publications, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Acta Sociologica*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

On Female Culture

an attempt to formulate a theory of women's solidarity and action

Berit As

(language assistance by Claire Perry)

Institute of Psychology, University of Oslo

As time passes and our efforts to acquire equal status with men seem to deteriorate just when we think that we are on the road to success, women have begun to ask: "Who are we, the women of the world? Where do we fit in?"

In time of crises and wars women are given responsibility and paid jobs. When peace and prosperity return we are thrown out of work and of political positions,¹ so we ask: Do not economic growth and "normal" conditions work in our favour? Does economic growth in our societies require a more uneven distribution of rights and duties among men and women? We have observed that aid from developed to developing countries seems to widen the gap between opportunities and salaries of men and women in those countries. How does this apply to women in developed countries?"

As the gap widens between the developed and developing countries, and between poor and rich in *all* countries, it also widens between men and women in almost every country of the world with respect to level of income and education. These contradictions work as contradictions usually do. The more inequality and differences are made visible, the more aware we all become of the gap we experience, and the more do we require an answer: "Who are we? Should we become radicals, socialists, liberals or revolutionary women in order to fight most successfully for women's liberation? While we fight, is it possible to perceive ourselves as placed at any point from left to right on the traditional political scale?"

Could it be that we have not yet acquired a theory in politics or in social science which satisfactorily explains and predicts our behaviour?

At this particular time in herstory, I wish to present the theory of female culture as a counter-culture.² As such it represents a paradox: When fully comprehended, it will offer the feminist movement a tool for self-reliance, group understanding and a platform for further strategy; But at the same time the female culture serves as a necessary counterpart to the highly visible male culture, which suppresses and exploits the female culture for its own purposes. To make this female culture visible is the first step in women's common fight for freedom.

To clarify my concept of female culture, my goal in this paper is to present a theoretical framework demonstrating the consistent pattern of happenings, behaviour, perceptions and ideas that women carry about themselves and the world. For all the helpless, bewildered and insecure women, many of whom feel themselves valueless and without lasting goals for action, it may function as a therapy in their present situation.

Why search for a new model?

Since 1947 when I first became a student of psychology, I have been interested in research on sex-differences. Through intensive reading and

¹ Hannelore Mabry: *Politik und Politische Bildung, – unkrut ins Parlament*, Verlag Ernst Vögel, München 1971.

² This article follows the main lines of a lecture given at the Katholieke Universiteit, Nijmegen, may 1974. Summary available in FEMINISTISCHE CULTUUR – EEN WETENSCHAPSKRITIEK. (No. 5).

research performed on this topic, I have gathered literally mountains of data. The range of data includes results on difference in value orientation, achievement motivation, self-evaluation, and positions reached in society by the two sexes. This of course implies different amounts of power and influence for those who attain the positions. And as the mountains grew, the puzzle became more and more apparent: While in general theories seemed to hold for most boys and men in society, they seemed useless for explaining and predicting female behaviour. To illustrate my point of view, I shall refer to an early study on American children of remarkably high intelligence.

It has been generally understood that high intelligence leads to success and high positions in society. In this classical study, about 100 boys and 100 girls of high intelligence were revisited 25 years after they had been tested by the psychologists. Almost every man had become a person of high standing either in art, business, politics, science or administration. Among the women, however, 75 % had become housewives and the remaining 25 % had chosen traditional women's occupations. Only a very few had reached the kind of position that could be compared with any of the men's.³

Very many intelligent young women who compare themselves for years with less intelligent brothers and schoolmates have blamed themselves for not having shown as much initiative or relevant motivation and for not having achieved as much as these males. Consequently they have felt guilty, inadequate or failures. Very few have seriously asked what mechanisms of society work in a definitely discriminatory way, both hindering women in reaching their goals and destroying their self-reliance and opportunities to influence the conditions of their adult lives.

Ellenor Maccoby, in her book "The Development of Sex-differences"⁴ reports an experiment from a high school population. In this study the intelligence scores of girls and boys were compared with how well the girls and boys were able to guess their grades on a future test. For the boys there was a positive correlation of $+0.63$ between intelligence and correct guessing. For the girls the figure was -0.47 . What this really means is that the brighter the boy, the better his guessing. For girls it means exactly the opposite!

In the oppressive male culture the first result may be explained as "women's will to fail", while the other example may support the idea among men the "women lack the most fundamental sense of logic". As some of you know, the famous theory on achievement-motivation never did fit any women's group. For this reason, psychologists doing research in this classical area were advised not to use female subjects in their studies as they would certainly "mess up the results".

Male psychologists within almost every area of the field have contributed to the growing confusion about female development. While mystified themselves they have contributed to further mystification, and they have seldom asked this key question: What is it that rips away

³ Terman & Oden: *The Gifted Child Grows Up. Genetic Studies of Geniuses.* (Int. Studies). 1948 Stanford University Press, Stanford, USA.

⁴ Eleanor Maccoby: *Development of Sex-differences.* Stanford University Press, Stanford 1966, USA.

from young women their strength, their self-reliance and their initiative during their growth into adult society?

Today we can safely conclude that social science was developed as generalizations and abstractions from men's experiences and practices. From *their* point of departure in political, cultural and economic life they have announced the universality of their principles of behaviour. Today we have overwhelming evidence that "laws" in the social sciences, from psychology to economics, from sociology to political science describe and predict male behaviour and attitudes, not female. This gives a man, as a member of the master culture, the tremendous privilege of defining and identifying himself as a meaningful unit of society for which there are reasons to plan, predict and achieve. The strength one gets from understanding one's own potentials and opportunities, and from being treated within a simple "reward-and-punishment system" instead of by a complex "double-bind" machinery *which usually punishes when it rewards*, is an inducement which releases men's energy, creativity and actions.

The mountains of data gathered on sex differences seemed for a while almost meaningless. While the data on men's behaviour gave a picture of an inner consistency, the data on female behaviour were usually described as deviant, different or difficult to explain. The woman student often had difficulties in identifying with theories of psychology. She was told they applied to *all* human beings, although they were actually based on the interests and ideas of the male mind, and tested out on white, male graduate students.

In this situation the need for problem solving presented itself to me over and over again. It remained obscure, however, until I read Gunnar Myrdal's book on "Asian Drama. The Poverty of the Nations".⁵

⁵ Gunnar Myrdal: *Asian Drama*, bd. 1-3, Allan Lane, New York 1968.

Unlearning the master model

In the early sixties, the famous economist Gunnar Myrdal was sent to South Asia to describe and analyse the economic conditions of countries, which for a while had received aid from the U.S.A. The problem which had appeared was that the effect of this aid had not been as great as expected. In his first book, the first chapter analyses the sources of bias in research. One of these sources he names "Transference of Western Concepts and Theories". He writes:

"Western theoretical approaches have assumed the role of master models. For reasons we shall go into at considerable length in the body of the book, a Western approach must be regarded as a biased approach".

When it comes to application of economic theory, Myrdal writes:

"When new data are assembled, the conceptual categories used are inappropriate to the condition existing, as, for example, when the underutilization of the labour force in South Asia countries is analyzed according to Western concepts of unemployment, disguised unemployment and underemployment. The resulting mountains of figures have either no meaning or a meaning other than imputed to them."

We would ofcourse use the same arguments for women and men in our western societies. The same explanatory models cannot be used. Women live in such a different economic, cultural and social world from men, that their reactions cannot be understood from a master model developed in male society.

What does Gunnar Myrdal do when he has drawn these conclusions? He starts travelling for a long time to describe the concrete cultural, social and economic conditions under which the populations in the countries of South Asia live. Then he develops his theory which is generalization and abstraction from realities and praxises. For us it is not necessary to travel. Obviously we live in a Women's World. But why is it so difficult to perceive it? Why is it so invisible? Who keeps it invisible? For what purposes? Let us answer these questions. But first . . .

Why did we choose the concept of culture?

The term "culture" was chosen purposely and in preference to terms like caste and class. This choice should not be considered final. It may be possible that the concepts of class and caste should be tried out on a later occasion.⁶ First, we observe that there are norms and standards of behaviour which are transmitted from one generation of women to the next. Furthermore, it seems that the mechanisms of transmission are unsatisfactorily and badly understood. We use the word culture because there is a complex comprehensive and potent system of values which are shared by most women. The American test (Allport/Vernon) on sex differences in values and interest gives about the same results for almost every society: Women get their high scores on scales for esthetic, social and religious values. Man get their high scores on scales for politics, economics and technology.⁷ The questions which have been asked are if these differences are inborn or are learned. Very few have asked *how* such basic value differences have developed, and about the *consequences* of such differences if they truly exist.

From a cultural base, we then propose that if large groups in society have fundamentally different values and interests, then they must be expected to react quite differently. We must expect that such groups give their own priorities to goals and actions which we should expect to find repeated in the goals and praxises of their main organizations. With different value systems, we could expect that they perceive the world in different ways, especially when it come to "tools and resources". (In our modern world we would refer to technology and

⁶ Ingrid Johanssen: *Housewives – A New Social Class (Husmødre – En ny sosial klasse)*, Institute of Sociology, University of Bergen, nov. 1974, mimeo. 16 pp., 1970.

⁷ Allport, G. W. & Vernon, P. E.: *A Study of Values*, Boston, Houghton Misslyn 1931.

finances and claim that a poor relationship to these factors indicate weak and suppressed positions.) If a different *female* culture is really functioning, then a few changes in the outer world or from *male* society's premises will not give major results. In fact, when laws for equal opportunity for the two sexes are enforced, the outcome often is further discrimination against women.

We will treat all these different dimensions of culture separately, but will underline a few final points. If a value system is kept alive it must stem from a practice common among women, but different from that of men. Every production form develops its own overbuilding of ideological character. It has become our main thesis that unpaid production is a special form of production in which women are kept mainly through punishment by shame and guilt.⁸ The size of this production, plus the way in which it is kept outside the reward system of money, power, prestige and social rights, indicates that the culture embracing it is very different from the one which prevails in male society. From the concrete experiences of women in unpaid production we also understand why sex-roles cannot be efficiently changed without a reorganization of other institutions of the society.

Finally, we should mention that the concept of female culture appears more and more often in literature. Dorothy Tennow claims that "females and males in this society live in two largely different cultures" and that they enter these cultures by different operant conditioning system.⁹ Phyllis Chesler makes this point in her book on "Women and Madness" and quotes researchers who insist that the methodology for studies developed in the male society, does not function as an efficient tool for analyzing women's problems.¹⁰

How is female culture kept invisible?

We all know from the Bible itself that historically women were not permitted to speak in public gatherings. The effect of non-communication through hundreds of years developed speechlessness and a feeling of isolation in women. In relatively recent years modern technology with the telephone, and especially the automobile in the United States, has contributed enormously to bringing women in contact with each other again. Women now have the opportunity to perceive and to formulate their problems together.

The kind of invisibility which female culture represents is unique and will be better understood with some anecdotes to illuminate it. For example, the executive committee of an important Norwegian cultural organization was discussing how to develop a future action program. It was suggested that every member propose the names of ten people, opinion leaders in different fields, and that this group of eminent persons should be invited to participate in a brainstorming session. The first male member of the committee suggested ten male names. The second man suggested ten more male names, as did the third and the fourth. Finally, my friend, the only female member of the committee,

⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith: *The Economics of The American Housewife*, Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 232, No. 2, Aug. 1973.

⁹ Tennow, Dorothy: *Behaviour Modification. The Principle and Application of Operant Conditioning*. Unpubl. manuscript, 1972, 1-15.

¹⁰ Phyllis Chesler: *Women and Madness, When is a Woman and Who is it who Decides?* Doubleday & Company, Garden City, New York 1972.

suggested ten names of well-known persons, all of them women. The others reacted spontaneously and yet in accord . . . "Why did you only mention women?" they asked. My friend perceived their further meaning to be this: "Why have you not proposed five women and five men since you are for equal opportunity."¹¹ The ten eminent women proposed by my friend were invisible in the men's minds and memories in spite of that fact that every one of them were well known in public life. Another example stems from the United Nations. A planning committee, which should present the plans for a World University was appointed. Neither Simone de Beauvoir, Alva Myrdal, Margareth Mead or Jean Robinson were appointed to this committee of 20.

Many languages use the word *man* as a synonym for human being. In the law texts or educational manuals of these languages all people or students are "he-s". Only Sweden has a name and pronoun for "human being" which is feminine. The consumer ombudsman in Norway is a woman. But when reports on her work are written, especially in foreign languages, she is referred to as a "he". If her actions are reported in international journals, we do not know for sure if readers all over the world will recognize her first name as a female one. Therefore perhaps her successes will register on readers' minds as the accomplishments of one more man.

Through years of domination men have conquered all the important positions in society. We therefore generally accept such designations as "foreman" and "chairman". Today, when a successful woman seeks to retain her identity by the designation "chairwomen", men are usually surprised. "Why is it necessary to change the title?" they ask. Surely women want to resemble men? This arrogant mentality often exists among the leading male group of a society. By ridiculing women's desire to attain recognition for women, they encourage the invisibility of female culture and discourage the attainment of equal opportunity.

Although law texts make women invisible by referring to all persons as "he-s", there is at least one woman who is conducting her own "silent language war". She works on formulating law texts for one of our Norwegian Departments of State, and has for years written both "he" and "she" as pronouns for the word "person". When her suggestions are returned to her from the higher authorities, the pronoun "she" is always edited out. But she refuses to give up her struggle. If we read the Norwegian laws on property, on taxes, on labour rights, she maintains, we always have a male in mind. If we exchange the pronoun and read the laws over again, we may find them unreal or even "funny". Therefore we take notice, perhaps for the first time, that women's rights are not properly taken care of, not even in the texts.

From work in the field of family therapy, many of us can illustrate another aspect of the invisibility of female culture. It is common for a woman who seeks support for her mental health to describe years of family life during which she has been expected to solve all the psychological curses in the family. It has been her role to support, explain, comfort and encourage all other family members. When she herself

¹¹ Personal communication from Ms. Birgit Brock-Utne, sociologist and educator, member of the board of Norwegian Film Production, 1972.

develops problems, however, she finds that nobody will listen to her. SHE HAS NO RIGHT TO HAVE PROBLEMS, since she is supposed to be the resource person for solving problems in her family. In place of help, she often receives anger and punishment. The others are "deaf and blind" to her need for help and she feels that she is treated in an unjust way. She is the social worker for her family, as well as its house-keeper, and she is the sexual object available for her man and is often mistreated as such.¹²

Women's invisibility, although, unique, has similarities to the kind of invisibility described by the black author, Ralph Ellison, in his book "Invisible Man". He writes:

"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; Nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasm. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I may even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."

and further

"When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me. Nor is my invisibility exactly a matter of a biochemical accident to my epidermis. That invisibility to which I refer ours because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, *those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality*. I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you are constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt whether you really exist".¹³

Although women are invisible as colleagues, personalities or serious working politicians, most men manage to see nice legs, a high bust, a "good figure", eyes and hair style. They are absolutely certain that those women who function in male society with some of the motives which males accept for themselves, cannot possibly function well as social and biological women. Men to whom women are only visible as sex objects have in fact legitimized the "playboy" ideology – that is, what you see in women is what you may want to use for your own purposes.

We will have to ask: Is the way in which the members of the master culture do *not* perceive, do *not* hear or do *not* remember a "master strategy" to rob women of identity and value? Is it a direct message to all women that we are without interest, meaning or sense within their culture? Or is it possible to explain these reactions in a way that is

¹² Recommendation presented to the UN's Second Committee during the General Assembly Autumn 1973, about the UN-WORLD UNIVERSITY.

¹³ Ralph Ellison: *Invisible Man*, Vintage, New York, 1972.

more favourable to men? Could it possibly be that men do not see the connection of a series of phenomena which they ascribe to the world of women, and since they are not even aware of the different structure of female culture, they cannot understand it. According to the principle of Gestalt psychology, messages without *structure* cannot be perceived by the receiver.

In order to understand the factors determining our own lives, and also to be able to communicate with the master culture by providing members of male society with a structural framework, it is necessary to make female culture visible. For that purpose we will describe how the two cultures differ, mainly by describing the female one, according to:

1. Language and communication
2. Organizations: leadership style, goal and recruitment patterns
3. Relations to tools (technology) and resources (finances)
4. Self-evaluation
5. Time perspective, availability of own time, future time and planning possibilities

Language and communication

Nancy Barron, a psychologist from Columbia, Missouri, wrote her doctor's thesis on "Language and Sex Roles". "If language is socialized behaviours", she claims, "and men and women are socialized by different reward and punishment systems, then it will necessarily follow that the two sexes structure the language differently".¹⁴

Through precise analysis of material gathered for other purposes, Ms. Barron finds support for 7 of her 9 hypotheses on *how* men's and women's language differ. Everyone of us who has observed language usage knows that there are different rules as to who is allowed to speak on different occasions. The language of obscenity is mastered by men and functions often to hurt and intimidate women, or to make them objects of men's wishes and wants. Women often feel, when confronted with such discrimination, in a way that they are made passive, because they themselves, are not "allowed" to use such language in their own defense. This feeling they cannot easily explain. They feel extremely uncomfortable on such occasions, a feeling which makes them helpless and without human dignity.

Language has a very specific function, indeed. It retains, for example, the meaning of words even when social change has occurred. As I mentioned in treating the phenomenon of invisibility, words for high positions were male words when only males held these positions. Although some high positions are now held by females, they are still symbolized by the words used to designate them as male positions. In Norway the old word for a parliamentarian was literally translated: *Parliament man*. When women were elected, the word was "neutralized" into "Parliament Representative". On a later occasion, when Parliament opened for the Fall 1970 session, our best known daily newspaper wrote: "The representatives and even some of their wives met in the

¹⁴ Nancy Barron: *Sex-Typed Language, The Production of Grammatical Cases*, Acta Sociologica, Special Issue on Sex Roles, Vol 14, No. 1-2 p. 24-42.

corridors." This kept, of course, the picture of a male M.P. in everybody's mind.

Language has a *normative function*, and it keeps connotations alive through *associations*, positive or negative in character. When an older woman meets a mother with her two small children and reacts in the following way, she preserves existing sex roles by transferring values of behaviour to the next generation through language: The young mother is walking with her three year old boy on one side and her girl of six on the other. The older woman stops, bends down to pat the little boy on his head and says: – "Oh, what a big strong boy". She straightens up and says in a soft voice – "And what a pretty sweet little girl." While she is not describing the children as they really are, she is conveying what the norms require her to expect.

By changing the sex of characters in literature without changing the situations, it is possible to develop considerable understanding of the normative function of language. This was done with a story by Hjalmar Söderberg, a well known Swedish writer. Some years ago a young woman art critic rewrote one of his novels and changed the sex of the main character of the book from a man with a mistress and a wife to the mistress whose lover is then the married man. Instead of getting *his* perspective on situations and conflicts in society, the critic offered the mistress' evaluation of the same happenings. The book then became a completely different book from the reader's point of view.¹⁵

When I now remind you of value systems, the following should be apparent: Through traditions, different kinds of unspoken associations follow different descriptive words in our minds. This becomes clear when we study synonyms. The series which I quote here stems from a recent book on synonyms:

Synonyms for woman:

Dame, donna, Eve, Eve's daughter, woman-folk, lady, matron, mother, nymph, sex-kitten, mam, madam, girl.

(Collectively) The weak sex, the second sex, the distaff side.

(Angry woman) Xantippe, Amazon, fury.

(Dumb woman) Goose, hen.

(Sexy woman) Coquette, prostitute.

(Intellectual Woman) Blue-stockings.

(The male author who presented these synonyms has obviously not yet met a red-stocking!)

In the *synonyms for man* the following list is offered: Man, Adam (Collectively) the strong sex, gentleman, a he, a master, mans-folk, a male person, person, personality, "The master of creation", the side of the sword, spouse, worker, crew, and "to be a man for", which is translated from Norwegian as "being able" or "to master".

The young psychologist who first quoted these synonyms wrote a book which he entitled: "Language is power".¹⁶ He observes that when an intellectual woman becomes a bluestocking (with some kind of

¹⁵ Gun-Britt Sundström: *För Lydia*, Bonnier, Stockholm 1973.

¹⁶ Rolv Blakar: *Språker makt*, p. 159, Pax, Oslo 1973.

negative connotation) we have no similar word for such a man. Mother is offered as a synonym for woman while father is not given as a synonym for man. While we find prostitute in the first list we do not find pimp in the second.

These synonyms associate back to the different settings in which men and women function or to situations in which men have the power to identify women's character. The next questions we therefore want to ask are: "Where are we really placed in the outer "real world"?", "What is *women's relationship to tools and resources* or technology and finances?"

Women's relationship to tools and resources or technology and finances

To function, a society is dependent on raw materials and the tools with which they can be processed. The kind of raw materials which are available determine to a great extent the kind of tools which are needed and these in turn determine the constitution of work groups and the organization of labour.¹⁷

Tools then are of vital importance for a society. The transfer of technical aid and technical know-how from developed to developing countries determines who achieves competence within the latter. In the analysis of aid to Africa it becomes apparent that the position of women, who in many areas constituted the majority of farmers, has been seriously devalued because the white man has taken for granted that knowledge can only be transmitted to men.¹⁸ In this way developed countries have exported oppression. In advanced technological countries it is required that the users of tools make themselves familiar with the construction of tools, with the new inventions of machinery and the developing opportunities which follow. The knowledge of new inventions and usages of tools are mechanisms in society which determine power relations and divide values as to division of work.

Males are not only made foremen and given tractors to handle in the cotton fields with all the women pickers as inferiors, but the electronic brains of "defense systems" are controlled by men who have thus become dangerously powerful in our world.¹⁹

If some groups are freed by tools and others become tied down as they operate them, different ideologies will develop between these people. While the freed people will develop ideals about activity, independence, mobility, achievement and competence, those who get tied down will need to explain and evaluate *their* functions. Since they will play the role of slaves in the master society, they will, like the knights of Hegel's system, define their qualities from the point of view of their masters' nobility. They will explain and evaluate their work in terms of obedience, self-sacrifice and patience, and so strongly will they be brought up to accept these traits as valuable for themselves that they will protest and become unhappy if any of the masters accuse them of being egotistical or defending their own interests. If these traits are

¹⁷ Marvin Harris: *The Nature of Cultural Things*, Random House, New York 1964.

¹⁸ Ester Boserup: *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London 1970.

¹⁹ Audrey Wipper: *The Politics of Sex, some Strategies employed by by the Kenyan power elite to handle a normative-existential discrepancy*, International African Institute 10/11, Fetter Lane, London EC41BJ.

required, then they become values in themselves in the under-dog culture. It might, in this connection, be of importance to refer to a quotation from Erich Fromm in which he deals with the question of how a successful socialization process takes place in a society: "It is concluded", he says, "when every member of the society really *wants* to do what he (she) in reality has to do".

Before we leave this area of thought and reality, we should ask a few questions about the actual relationship between women and technology. Everybody knows how men have argued against women's access to new technological inventions. Believe it or not, when the typewriter was introduced in Norway, male sexists claimed that women would lose all their attractive female features if they were made to operate this machinery. We all know how women drivers are ridiculed in cartoons and newspaper jokes as incompetent, confused and helpless drivers. But I can document from my years of accident research, female under-representation in severe automobile accidents.

While walking in New York City, as I did during two months last fall, these questions were formulated in my mind: When did we women construct these skyscrapers? Who among us designed the latest models of automobiles, with special care to install after burner machinery to keep the air clean? Who among my sisters masters the designs and constructions of the traffic intersections? Do we have a clear concept of the consequences of this transportation system, we who are mothers, nurses, and women workers taking care of the crippled and hurt ones created by this system? Why do so few of us know the secrets of colour TV, and the principles of the EDB systems by which we all are registered and evaluated? What responsibility do I and my sisters and daughters carry for the B-52 bombers or the anti-personnel bombs which "it has been necessary to test out" on populations in developing countries?

In fact, we would neither know how to handle them in wars nor how to defend ourselves and our offspring against them. This reveals one of the most extreme power relationships between strong and weak, man and child/woman, which I presently observe.

Finally, not only were most of us ignorant as to how the moonrocket – value 28 billion dollars – was launched and constructed, but women who participated in the astronaut training program and performed better than their male colleagues in important tests, were thrown out of the program without any explanation. The reason was self-evident: The prestige which would follow successful performance in outer space could not be attributed to women without seriously influencing the male culture's definition of them. As one astronaut expressed it, when interviewed by MS magazine about the interrupted training program: "We will take women into space, but we will use them for the purposes which we use them for on earth."²⁰

We know that the cost of technology is very high and that only persons who are able to sell their labour for a good price will have the chance to buy themselves a car, a house, a sailing boat or a holiday cottage. Those of us who have accumulated capital and increased it by

²⁰ Joan McCullough: *13 Who Were Left Behind (Yes, we do have women astronauts!)*, Ms. Magazine, Sep. 1973, Vol. 2, No. 3.

careful organization of our finances can buy and use the technology to free us and make us mobile. In this connection I would like to mention that in Norway, where only 23 % (1971) of married women have entered the labour market on a full or half time basis, about 55 % of housewives want to take a job or to educate themselves for jobs and would do so if adequate day-care institutions were provided. Among those in the labour force in Norway equal pay is not a reality between men and women in the same kind of jobs, and 80 % of the lowest paid jobs in industry are held by women.

Very few women are economically independent. As new data becomes available it continues to show that employed women carry the double burden of household work and work outside the home. One of the last reports in this connection stems from a study performed at the Institute for Social Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The result confirms that all married women, both those who are housewives only, and those who carry double responsibilities, have on the average a ten hour longer work-week than do married men.²¹ Women find it difficult to organize because they lack time. Moreover, to be poor means to be out of money for labour-saving machinery to perform efficiently, to lack time for planning one's own future and production, and to be unorganized in a world of strong organizations.²²

In other places in this paper, I have mentioned the relation between women and salaries, women and money. Information of difference in salaries between males and females constantly pours in from all countries and most occupations. "The New York Review of Books" for May 16, 1974, states: "For every \$100 earned by the average full-time male worker in 1968 (in the U.S.A.) his female counterpart earned \$58.21. A typical eighth grade male graduate earned as much as a woman B.A. working full time".²³ I will deal with this relationship now, since there is a possibility that it is exactly here we can expect to find the key for understanding female culture and female values.

It is well known that while the value system of other groups often has been understood from their relationship to the means of production, this idea has not been fully explored to explain women's value system. Economists, however, have recently started to work on the problem. The Nobel prize winner Samuelson at Harvard has started to develop a concept which could possibly substitute for growth in GNP measures for improved standard of living.²⁴ Galbraith has treated "The Economics of the American Housewife" in the Atlantic Monthly, August, 1973, and in a way that is neither superficial nor traditional in economics. He writes:

"Much effort has been devoted in the past hundred years to finding ways of preserving personal service, and with good reason. It is unequally vulnerable to industrial development and the opportunities there provided. The search for surrogates has led generally to women and the family. It has made use of pervasive force in the shaping of social attitudes -- one that has

²¹ Alexander Szalai (ed.): *The Use of Time*, Mouton, P.O. Box 482, The Hague, The Netherlands (price is \$48).

²² Moren, Hallenstvedt, Brautaset, Dowland: *Norske organisasjoner*, Tanum, Oslo 1972.

²³ Ezorsky, Gertrud: The fight over University women, *The New York Review of Books*, May 16th, 1974. Vol. 21:8 pp. 32-39.

²⁴ Dorothy Crook: *Perspectives - An Interview with Paul A. Samuelson* in Economic Impact, No. 5, U.S. Information Agency, 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20547, USA.

often been sensed but rarely described and which may be called the Conventional Social Virtue. The Conventional Social Virtue ascribes merit to any pattern of behaviour, however uncomfortable for the individual involved, that serves the comfort or well-being of the more powerful members of the community. The moral commendation of the community for convenient (for men) and therefore virtuous behaviour then serves as a substitute for pecuniary compensation. Inconvenient behaviour (from men's point of view) becomes deviant behaviour and is subject to the rights disapproval or sanction of the community".²⁵

²⁵ Op.cit., John Kenneth Galbraith.

What size does unpaid production represent in a society? As you know, information about social conditions of suppressed groups that can cause "trouble" is seldom gathered. In Sweden, however, data were collected for the year 1938. It was found that the amount of hours invested in household work that year amounted to 2,000 million hours, while the number of hours invested in industrial work was 1,200 million hours.²⁶ The main difference was that every hour in industry was a paid hour. And of course as time has passed another difference has emerged: A paid job also guarantees social security in the form of paid sick leave, vacations, and pensions for old age.

²⁶ Official statistics of Sweden.

But household work is certainly necessary production. We cannot leave it undone. It is of the greatest importance for the well being of families, and women all over the world do it without pay. Many men are surprised when they find out how much work, and a lot of it heavy work, women perform in their homes. Very arrogantly men sometimes ask – "What keeps women there?" It is natural for people to ask such a question when they themselves have entered the money-exchange system. But the moral of a double standard always shows itself when these men explain that their own wives have *chosen* to become homemakers. Women, themselves, feel what Galbraith has described as mechanisms to keep them in place. They are aware of talk in the local community of deviant behaviour, and women tend to suffer from bad consciences if they do not fulfill their "normal" duties.

This psychological machinery is tremendously forceful. It is from unpaid production that women achieve their portion of the society's wealth, administered to them both in material and psychological rewards by their fathers and husbands. In this connection it is relevant to refer to one of the criteria which Lenin used to identify social classes:

"Classes are big groups of people which differ from each other by their roles in the society's division of labour, and in accordance to this by the way they receive their part of the wealth of society, and the size of that part".²⁷

²⁷ From the Study Material of the Norwegian Socialist People's Party.

We will also follow the class idea a little further because it provides for further insight into the realities of surplus value. A few examples will illustrate my point.

In Norway we have many small farmers. When average incomes

between industrial workers and farmers are compared, we are often told that a small difference in favour of farmers cannot be interpreted correctly unless we take into account that about a third of the production on the farm is due to the wife's labour. In some cases, today, the small farmer himself takes an outside job and the daily care of the cattle and the field is his wife's responsibility. In these cases income from the total production is attributed to the husband, and pension rights as well as all social security measures are defined as *his* social rights.

Women in this category have started to ask: Who takes my rights away from me? Who gets the surplus value of my production?

In Norway, our pension is built up from a base which every citizen gets at age 67, plus pension points from the twenty best years of paid salaries. Women who do not work outside their homes do not get these higher pensions. Often women are torn by the contradictory effects of community pressure and their own needs. To illustrate: A woman had for some years held a secretarial job. At the age of 50, her husband became an invalid. She did not want to give up her job and stay home with her sick husband, and for this attitude she was severely punished by her neighbours, her friends and her husband, all of whom claimed that she did not love him any more. Besides her own need to continue working at her job, she was faced with a substantial financial penalty if she gave it up. By continuing to work she could keep her husband in an institution and visit him daily. If she stopped working and both of them lived on his sickness-security money, including an extra sum "to provide for" a wife, the difference in yearly income would amount to about 20,000 kroner. I advised her to find out how much her own old age pension would be reduced at the age of 67 if she stopped working. The authorities calculated the difference and came up with the following result: If she left her job, at age 67 her own pension would be reduced by 560 kroner monthly – more than \$100 per month.²⁸

A large number of women within our society between the ages of 40 and 55 are expected to stay home and care for invalided parents and spouses. We seldom hear of male workers who quit their jobs in order to take care of sick family members!

Who are the people who rob these women of the surplus value of their production? Why is it that women earning, for example, 600 kroner less per month than men doing the same job, have not cried out earlier: "Who steals those 600 kroner out of my pocket!"

"Classes are that kind of groupings of people, which function in such a way that one of them cannot acquire the value of the work of the other, because of their different placement in the household of society." (Lenin)

Organizations

I shall comment very briefly upon a third dimension of female culture which has puzzled many, especially men: If we systematically study the membership lists, the economic strength and the influence of dif-

²⁸ Personal communication about a real case. Information given by an alternate member of the Norwegian Parliament from South-Trøndelag: Aud Gusta. Figures calculated by the local authorities on taxes and social security in Trondheim.

ferent organizations in society, we will very soon discover that organizations of influence and power are male organizations. In Norway, an overview of all national organizations has been published. From this, conclusions can be drawn which I think will apply to most other countries.

Associations which handle money, technological matters and political problems have male members in the majority. In fact, there are almost no women in these organizations. However, as organizations change in the direction of stating humanistic goals or identify themselves as peace movements, they get more and more invaded by women.

Within women's organizations, those which require altruistic work carry the highest membership numbers. There has, up to now been a directly negative correlation between number of members in women's associations and the degree to which they fight for their own rights and interests. In Norway, a country of 4 million people, there are 5-600,000 members in the big humanitarian organizations doing comprehensive health work. Women's groups in political parties have between 5-30,000 members; And I should mention in this connection that very seldom do women parliamentarians come from these groups.²⁹ Interest groups, however, like the FEMINIST PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S CLUB and THE ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN account for less than 1,000 persons. Although it is very interesting to go deeply into leadership styles and recruitment patterns of these organizations, I will not at this time elaborate further on this theme. I must however underline that the argument in many of these organizations concerns the "fact" that they are "not political" in nature. It appears to be as bad for women to be political as it is to be egotistical.

The important fact about this issue is that no party really has special programs for women's liberation. They all state rather similar goals - "Equal pay for equal jobs, a free choice of profession for women, more day care institutions, and extensive adult education for everybody, women included". The problem is that women's liberation politics have never gotten high priority in any party. Since male politicians know this either consciously or subconsciously, they are scared when it occurs to them that women one day could unite. And in fact most women who have achieved high positions in their parties must at some time declare loudly, like Annemarie Renger did in Germany: "I am not a female alibi".

Women, their time, future and planning

In conversation with women, I have found that "time" as an issue is not clearly formulated although when analyzed, it is of the greatest interest. Women seldom ask themselves: "Do we own our own time? Can I plan today exactly which goals I want to achieve 10 years from now? What kind of time perspective do I really have on my own life?" Many women know that for them there are great frustrations in plan-

²⁹ Ingunn Norderval Means: *Women in Norwegian Politics (Kvinner i norsk politikk)*, J. W. Cappelens Forlag A.S., Oslo 1973.

ning. The abrupt interference of plans made by other members of the family puts the woman's plans low on the ranking list of priorities. This fact of family life throws women into a common defence system of *not planning* in order to avoid frustrations.

The following example illustrates how girls are influenced early in life not to plan their own future. For two years I worked as a vocational councillor. Young men and young women visited my office and I always asked them – “What do you really want to be?” Men answered readily. Girls hesitated before they said – “Taking into account that I may marry, I should perhaps choose . . .” Then I stopped them and said again – “Listen to my question. Will you tell me what kind of job you would prefer if you choose freely?” The girls usually continued in this way – “If I marry and have children, the best jobs would perhaps be . . .” If I stopped them the third time, I said – “What kind of work do you really think you would like? Would you like to help people, work in arts or crafts, or travel? Or do you want to get a high education? What would you really prefer?” The conversation often ended with this answer – “If I have children, I think I better . . .”

The mental barriers are so heavy that many of these girls never allowed themselves to think of alternatives which might exclude them from the values advocated by the master society: To get married, to stay married and to serve the family. And thus women are robbed of their identity. “People who do not know their identity, will neither know what they will become.”

The importance of serving another person first contributes to an attitude common to most women: “I will do it afterwards.” Concrete examples sound like this: “After I have washed the dishes, I will . . .” or “I hope I can participate when my mother-in-law gets better”, or “If I only knew that my husband would stay in this job, I would look for a job myself”, or “When the children grow up, I think that I could, perhaps, if nothing else happens and the family does not need me – go back to education”. In a recent study which I supervised called “The need for adult education among women”, we found 48 persons out of 250 who wanted for over 10 years to get an education and “could not” start until they reached an average age of 41–42 years.³⁰

It is difficult to plan if time does not belong to yourself. As Gunnar Myrdal wrote in the book which I have previously quoted: “Economic planning as an ideology of the state presented itself first at the time when India got her independence”. Only independent persons can plan, and it is a sign of freedom and independence if you can plan how to handle your life in the future. This dimension is psychological in character. There are feelings and constrictions in the female culture which influence how we perceive the future . . . and the past. Jean Paul Sartre has touched upon this question when he treats the context of roles:

“The expectations belong to the future; Therefore our roles belong to the future. They present themselves to everybody as as-

³⁰ Runa Haukaa: *Women and Competence-Building Adult Education*. Article in the educational Journal *Convergence* (Canada). In print.

signments which shall be performed, traps which shall be avoided, power which shall be exercised".³¹

We are strongly reminded of the old woman who greeted the two children. She forecast their future, and defined them mentally in her web of expectations. From this mentally restricted consciousness, we give in and adjust to the pattern of taking on whatever job requires us here and now, piecemeal and determined by other people who we expect to exercise the power to decide. And from this experience all through our lives, stems the "cleaning-up-afterwards" attitude which makes neurotics of so many women.

Some of the questions deeply embedded in our subconsciousness remain there invisible and unsolved. But sometimes they reach the surface of our thoughts and we find them unbearable as we scream: "For heaven's sake, who created this mess?" This lifestyle of cleaning-up-afterwards is like a bad spell on women. As housewives we clean up every day – floors, dishes, clothes and garbage. As nurses we clean up afterwards when the traffic victims appear. As crises occur, we are suddenly needed as helpful hands again, happy to be around in politics and production if only to receive praise from those who have the power to decide what to reward, and when to reward us. Could not any of the consequences of pollution, stress phenomena, accident and war victims have been avoided? Could not women themselves have responsibility for diminishing the population explosion? Could we not function as free people organizing our lives so that women could think for themselves, communicate with each other, organize and break through to meaningful equality?

The value of a woman

In many societies a woman is not worth very much. This was brought out in a recent study of a valley population in Norway which included questions on the status of women. The leader of this study, Arnlaug Leira, was surprised when she received the women's answers. "Women in this valley are of no value", some of them said, "and if they are single, they are worth less than nothing".³² One might conclude that this is true only within a declining small farm area. It is not. I happen to live in a "West-end" community just outside Oslo. Average incomes here are among the highest in Norway. One Sunday I happened to meet a neighbour who was crying bitterly. She spoke to me in spite of the fact that we did not know each other well:

"I have been waiting for an hour. My husband and my son promised that we should go for a walk this Sunday morning, and I have been looking forward to it for hours. I have served them breakfast, the house is neat and clean. When I asked them to plan the day since it is Sunday, they wouldn't. Now they are sitting at the table, reading newspapers, smoking. It seems that

³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre: *Existentialism and marxism*, Kbh. 1969.

³² Arnlaug Leira, Steinar Berg: *"Hå har et kvinnfolk å sia, da!"*, Pax, Oslo 1974.

they have forgotten everything they promised. They get angry when I ask for planning because they want to take the day leisurely. Which means that I will have to serve them and clean up after them all day. They don't give a damn any more. They treat me like a cigarette butt, which they throw away and rub out with their heel to finish it off."

This anecdote describes a woman who feels herself to be of little value in the eyes of husband and son. It also demonstrates the element of frustration caused for this woman by an abrupt change of plan by others, and it shows her invisibility as she stands with her wants and hopes in the midst of her family which ignores them.

She does not protest because she has been accustomed to this treatment. If I had suggested that she might leave her husband and family, she would undoubtedly have asked: But where would I go? I have no house, no money, no car, and without my husband I would be deprived of our nice group of friends.

Lack of worth is learned early in life. A friend of mine who was born on a little Norwegian farm tells her story:

"... to be a woman in those days was not glamorous. You could feel it in many ways. At an early age I fully understood that the discrimination was based on economics. My family was poor, like most of the small farmers in the thirties. Mother and father worked extremely hard on the farm. Mother took care of the house and the children, in addition to all her other jobs. She tended the cows, did the milking and produced the butter. My father travelled to town and sold the products of her labour. The money became his. He decided what it should be used for. Often my parents disagreed about this. I thought for a while that my father was an exception, that he was difficult to "handle". My first experience in a paid job made me understand the whole thing better. I was 12 years old that fall and my brother was 10. We were asked to help the neighbour with the wheat. I worked faster than my brother. I was praised because I could take everything away from the machines so fast. When the day was over, I was paid 2 kroner, my brother 5, because he was "a little man" they said".

Young boys and girls still get a small difference in payment in many places where the work is supposed to be physically hard.³³

A research project from the United States shows this difference in value perception among small children. I quote from a conversation in "Rap on Race" between the famous American anthropologist, Margaret Mead and the writer James Baldwin, author of "The Fire Next Time" and "Nobody Knows My Name". He is one of the authors, I think, who most intimately and dramatically has described how one feels when discriminated against. Margaret Mead tells that some social scientists in

³³ Annemor Stensland: *The reasons why – and the consequences of low status*, Article in *The Little Red Book for Women* (Kvinnerenes lille røde), Gyldendal Norsk Forlag A.S., Oslo 1971.

America have recently finished a study in which they asked small white boys what they would like to be if they had to be something other than small white boys. Would they rather be small white girls or small black boys? "Do you know what they answered?" she asked. "No, I cannot guess", said Baldwin. "They would rather be small black boys", she continued. Baldwin exclaimed: How encouraging! It shows that they still have some sense left."³⁴

The recognition of lack of value of girls stems from a nearly conditioning process. I once observed two of my own sons when they, for the first time, participated in the master strategy of devaluation. Five boys between 3 and 5 years were playing together in the nursery when the only little girl in the apartment house knocked on our door to be let in. My oldest son, 5 years old, opened the door. "May I play with you?" she asked . . . and then something happened, something I had never seen before. It happened with some hesitation as if the boy played a game for the first time in his life, and one which he seemed to enjoy. "No, you cannot play with us", he said, "because we do not play with girls anymore". She became bewildered. "But I wear pants", she said, showing her immediate acceptance of the male society's premises. Won't do", said the master, "Your name is Mary!" She tried to solve that one too. "You can call me Jacob", she said. But my son didn't accept. Like all oppressors when they finally solve the problem, he referred to signs of biological differences: "It won't help you. You have long hair." When she went away sobbing, I felt upset, but I did not interfere. This girl's fight for her self-worth must start later – when she would become familiar with the master strategies and understand the social mechanisms of oppression. At the time I could only conclude: Give her three, four or five of these experiences at an early age, and when they are forgotten, her unconscious will go on feeling anxious because she was not accepted for failing to live up to the standard set by her master society.

Conclusions

In this paper I have claimed that there exists a female culture. It is strong and comprehensive. The norms, values and standards of female behaviour, which are transmitted from one generation to the next, are carried by social mechanisms which are unsatisfactorily described and badly understood. *I have not in this paper pointed to the content and qualities of these values*, including the values of cleanliness and conserving. I claim further that this culture is *invisible*, and that it is kept invisible by certain strategies developed in the interest of the dominant male society.

I have not in detail described the different master strategies, although they are not too difficult to identify and discuss. In another paper (in print) I have discussed five of them in detail.³⁵ I have proposed here that theory on female culture is *necessary* at this time in herstory and I have given some reasons for that. I have further given

³⁴ Margareth Mead and James Baldwin: *A Rap on Race*, 1971, Lippincott Company, N.Y.

³⁵ Berit As: *Master Strategies as Social Mechanisms of Oppression*. Paper in print.

examples to illuminate the content of the five dimensions chosen. These dimensions interlock. From this material, it will be possible for others to develop ideas on *how this interdependence works*. It is possible that more dimensions should be added, or that those chosen could be given a slightly different content.

Finally I propose that the ideology which goes with this female culture stems from women's participation in unpaid production.