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## Sex Roles and Social Change<sup>1</sup>

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### *Introduction: Theories and Strategies*

THE FOLLOWING IS A tentative outline of perspectives on changing sex roles in present-day society. First, a brief summary of some theories on sex roles and social change is given. It is of course impossible here to give justice to the great variety and depth of sex-role theories, but attention is drawn to a few systematic descriptions of how and why sex roles are established and maintained. Second, an elaboration of important points of theoretical descriptions, as seen by this author, contains the substance of this article. The focus is here on fairly recent changes in sex roles and their links with society at large. Finally, questions of strategy, i.e., questions as to where in the social structure—in the light of theory—actions toward change should be directed in order to result in desired consequences, are discussed.

### *Some Theories of Sex-Role Change*

Most theories about change in sex roles have a global character. They are often formulated with a view to understanding the very existence of gender differentiation, and at the same time purport to explain changes in the position of women especially.

A considerable number of authors simply point to changing "traditions" or "attitudes" as the main basis for changes in sex roles. Since traditions and attitudes are among the phenom-

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

ena to be explained, only theories that attempt to do so are mentioned here. Also, theories of sex roles that give constitutional features of men's and women's psychology a main explanatory status must necessarily be excluded here, since they do not lend themselves to an understanding of changes in the system.

The sociological, anthropological, and social-psychological theories all seem to point—ultimately—to changes in the requirements of the economic system as the prime moving forces of shifts in sex roles or changes in the status of women.

The American sociologist Goode, for example, points to industrialization as a main explanation for a trend toward egalitarian relations within and outside the family. The industrialized economy and its need for a mobile, flexible, labor force is best served with a small, independent family. Goode postulates a "fit" between the conjugal family and the modern industrial system, stressing the individual's right to move about and the universalistic evaluation of skills. The increasing demand for skill and mobility tends to eliminate barriers of race and sex, and, in addition, forces within the conjugal family press for equality between husband and wife.<sup>2</sup>

Bott, especially, has shown how the social network of a family—that is, its total web of friends and social contacts—may influence the division of tasks in the family.<sup>3</sup> The families with looser social ties cannot count on stand-ins in traditional roles, and husband and wife are forced to give up a traditional arrangement and to share more than the families with more close-knit networks. Mobility combined with urbanization, which is likely to produce socially isolated families, may thus develop more egalitarian relations between spouses.

"The crisis theory of women's equality" furnishes another illustration of a view of changing sex roles. Rapid modernization as well as war and crisis often seem to bring women into "male" positions, at least for some time,<sup>4</sup> a fact which may be interpreted as a national mobilization of all resources, even secondary ones. In times of crisis, the economic or military demands may, at least temporarily, lead to a breakdown of cultural norms and ideals pertaining to men's and women's tasks. The fact that gender differentiation is reestablished,

although often in novel forms, when crisis conditions disappear does not render the "crisis theory" useless. It serves to illustrate the importance not only of material resources but also of the time necessary for changing ascribed roles. The possibilities and limitations for sex-role change inherent in a society are likewise demonstrated during crisis.

Also relevant is the notion that sex differentiation is caused by gender differences in physical strength, which suggests that when technological development renders physical strength unimportant, as in highly mechanized production, this will eventually diminish sex differentiation.

In Marxist thinking, strategy can hardly be separated from theoretical descriptions without doing injustice to both. Nevertheless, for the sake of analysis and since Marxist theory is the theory of social change par excellence, a few points concerning Marxist ideas on changes in sex roles are presented here, rather than in the last section. Marx never formulated a comprehensive view on the subject, although his works contain several references to it; traditional Marxist theory is mainly developed by Engels<sup>5</sup> and later by Bebel<sup>6</sup> and Lenin.<sup>7</sup> In general, Marxist analyses of sex differentiation and sex discrimination are, of course, formulated in terms of historical development, starting with changes in the material conditions. With the development of surplus capital in prehistoric times, man—who through a natural and nondiscriminating division of labor with women had access to the surplus—took possession and instituted private property. Private property again necessitates individual as opposed to collective households and rules of inheritance. This is the foundation of the patriarchal family in which the father rules, and in which women and children are subjugated to the father.

Engels as well as Lenin saw women's participation in modern, collective forms of production and the disappearance of individual household work as a condition for equality and liberation of women. Lenin strongly advocated the establishment of child-care institutions and partly collective household functions in the Soviet Union, and seemed to believe that the U.S.S.R. was on the road to the liberation of women.

It is recognized, however, also among Marxists, that im-



portant elements of traditional gender discrimination have survived in Eastern Europe, and that additional theoretical considerations must be brought to bear on Marxist ideas about the subject. Simone de Beauvoir,<sup>8</sup> Evelyn Sullerot,<sup>9</sup> Juliet Mitchell,<sup>10</sup> and others have started this work, bringing forth rather different conceptions of sex roles and the forces which influence them. Most important is de Beauvoir's attempt to link historical materialism to a conception of man as a being of transcendence, seeking always to dominate the other, to exercise his sovereignty in an objective fashion. Men would not have used their early material advantage to dominate women had this not been embedded in their existential condition. According to de Beauvoir, then, a change in sex roles requires not only changes in the economic and social order, but first of all women's attainment of authenticity.

Recent Marxist theories on women's position are all very vague with respect to the crucial distinction between equality in a capitalist versus a socialist society. This is perhaps most evident in Mitchell's analysis, which focuses on the situation of women with respect to production, reproduction, socialization, and sexuality. Only changes in all these four structures can bring about equality between men and women, but they are at present in different stages of development. The problem of structures in which women are *not* integrated, e.g., the political power structure, the relation between class struggle and sex equality, is left undiscussed in Mitchell's article. One is further led to forget that some of the repression and manipulations to which women are subject are shared by men.

One of the difficulties of a strict Marxist analysis of gender differentiation is that such differentiation is common to all productive relationships, but is less important than the more specific relationship expressed by social classes.<sup>11</sup> Gender differentiation as such cannot be linked to capitalism. The task of Marxists is to place gender differentiation as an element in the productive relationship and in the superstructure, not as a property of the productive forces. The Marxist's specific, historical elaboration of the differentiation must, however, be

seen in light of the class structure, a question to which we may return in the discussion of strategy.

The mainly sociological analyses of sex roles cited above offer a natural mixture of pessimism and optimism with respect to the possibility of changes in sex differentiation in current society. The same is true of writers who have developed theories in which sex roles are seen as consequences of specific biological and sexual differences between men and women. Montagu,<sup>12</sup> for example, postulates women's biological superiority over men, and the unconscious striving of men to dominate and take revenge on women. The Norwegian psychologist Nissen<sup>13</sup> (see pp. 42-50) maintains a different sexual cycle for the two genders, and shows some of the implications of such a possibility in terms of male-dominated societies.

Such deeper psycho-social elements of sex differentiation are not discussed in the following. The present modes and the present maintenance of sex roles, rather than their ultimate origin, causes, and historical development are the themes in what follows. Furthermore, the discussion builds on the assumption, among others, that sex roles are of secondary importance as a force of social change in general. Also, the importance of basically economic forces, combined with technological developments and ideological shifts—as summarized in this section—is recognized. The analysis stresses, however, a trend toward *latent sex differentiation* and *latent discrimination* in industrial societies, as opposed to manifest differentiation in traditional society. It differs from some theories of changing sex roles in viewing sex differentiation not as something which either exists or is eliminated, but as a social arrangement which may take on different forms and functions.

### *Theoretical Elaborations*

#### *Sex Differentiation and Potentials for Change*

Anthropologists have labeled gender differentiation "the primary division of labor," and with good reason. Gender differentiation is more ancient, more stable, and more wide-



spread than any other type of social differentiation. It appears under all known economic systems and political orders. The very existence of sex roles cannot be attributed to special forms of production or subsistence conditions.

But the *extent* to which sex—or, rather, gender—constitutes a differentiating element in society varies considerably culturally and historically. This is true of the modes and substance of gender differentiation as well. It may be maintained, for example, that the degree of task differentiation between men and women has been kept stable over the last hundred years, since a number of “new” job openings for women actually are extensions into modern work life of their traditional tasks. At the same time, this shift in women’s production from a primary to a secondary social frame for their work constitutes a change in the mode of sex differentiation. Such shifts also point to changes in those social forces which maintain sex differentiation.

Gender differentiation is here used primarily to include a division of tasks between men and women which is accompanied by a consistently different personality formation of the two genders. Such differentiation usually also discriminates against women, and it is the contention of the present author that discrimination of women necessarily follows from most known gender differentiations.<sup>14</sup>

The consequences of social changes for the extent and modes of sex differentiation practiced in a society—including degree of discrimination—is a main theme in the following discussion. It is an assumption, then, that the extent and modes of sex differentiation are more resultants than determiners of changes in other social and economic relations. This does not imply that changes in gender differentiation are without consequences for social structure and cultural conditions. The opposite is the case, since gender differentiation contributes to the maintenance of a number of other social arrangements.<sup>15</sup> But sex differentiation contains less of a dynamic potential for conflict and change than, for example, social classes or technological change. The very stability of sex differentiation should therefore also be exposed, at least in part, by the analysis presented here.

### *Sex Differentiation and Social Structure*

The modes and degree of sex differentiation are partly a reflection of requirements of the economic system at large and of more specific demands for a suitable labor-and-consumption force. Sex differentiation is also directly influenced by technological changes, such as the invention of contraceptives. The changes in cultural values which have developed, partly in harmony with and partly in opposition to the postindustrial economic demands, sometimes have a direct bearing on the current ideas about differentiation, ideas which to a large extent are contradicted by sex-differentiating practices.

The shift from a production-oriented to a consumption-oriented economy have changed women’s position more than men’s, and in at least two ways. First, women’s services have increasingly been extended directly to production outside the home, and employers take a novel interest in the female labor force. Second, the “consumption-and-fun ethos” has brought women into focus as consumers—and as fun. The last pattern is supported by the invention of a number of contraceptives, which has also implied new freedom for women as well as men.

A modern economy requires a mobile, partly well-trained labor force, and men are more mobile than women. Young women, however, have proved willing to move in great numbers to the urban centers, a development that has created population imbalances in the cities as well as in the rural areas. The changes in the structure and function of the family facilitate mobility for men as well as women, and the changes in the family have probably provided increased sex-role equality between husband and wife. Physical strength has become less important for unskilled and semiskilled jobs, which should tend to eliminate sex differences in the lower echelons in industry. The expansion in white-collar jobs and the stagnation in blue-collar work favor women to a certain extent; the same may be true of a shift from labor conflict and industrial struggles to an atmosphere of negotiation, human relations skills, and attempts at psychological manipulation of employers.





Most of these changes in the desired properties of the labor force should favor women in the lower positions in firms and corporations, and may in time produce a certain pattern of equality in these sectors. The development, however, has not at all been conducive to equality in the middle and higher levels of industrial work units. The demands for leadership, devotion, education, efficiency, and stress-taking, when higher level work is concerned, effectively shut out women from the business elite and other types of elite.

Women's confinement to routine and service work is balanced, as it were, by their important function as consumers who are flexible and sensitive to advertising and status consumption. Women are even increasingly consumers of education, which partly serves to solve a main problem of modern economy: the absorption of surplus.<sup>10</sup> This is the more evident since women to some extent make no use of their education. But there is still a large group of women who work all day, nowadays, because they have two jobs, and another group who are full-time consumers.

Women's work in the home constitutes part of the infrastructure of modern economy. Women's poorly paid, isolated work with children and family is clearly one of the conditions for the efficient, collective organization of "official" production. In both production spheres, and in the main, men still have the leadership positions, and women do the serving.

Since a large number of women are fairly isolated housewives, their conceptions of themselves and each other are mediated to them through "a third party"—especially the mass media. Such stereotyped self-images of women are less conducive to feelings of solidarity among women than direct contact and cooperation.

At the same time, new values constantly question this lack of changes in the basic differentiation according to gender. Ever since women came to be regarded as human beings, comparisons between the situations of men and women have been legitimate. Secularization and universalism have furnished new standards for such comparisons; equality, scientific rationalism, and "criticism is a duty" have strengthened these ideas.

The main effects of economic and social changes outlined

above point to some forms of increased equality, but also to strong elements of inequality and covert sex differentiation. An elaboration of the changes that have taken place in sex differentiation may furnish some explanations for this situation.

#### *From Traditional Sex Roles to Quasi-egalitarianism*

The first type of change to be discussed is one from an openly recognized and accepted differentiation, which is expressed in legal rules or other codes, to a more covert differentiation, a quasi-egalitarianism.<sup>17</sup> Present-day sex differentiation is neither officially accepted nor manifested in legal codes, but constitutes a contrast to the official ideology. This discrepancy between ideology and reality is a "modern" phenomenon, the maintenance of which is closely related to the complexity of industrialized society.

The term "quasi-egalitarianism" refers to elements of latency in present-day sex differentiation as well as to certain mechanisms for covering sex differentiation.

Latent structures are potentials for which there exists a psychological and social preparedness, and which come into operation under certain circumstances. For example, some kinds of sex differentiation in the labor market or in education appear only under conditions of scarcity. When jobs are abundant, that is, when the business cycle is rising, women are in demand and may get jobs which would be denied them under economic downturns. When parents can afford to give all children an education and they don't have to choose between sons' and daughters' education, the fact that parents would usually give priority to the education of a son is not expressed in action. There exists, nevertheless, a constant psychological propensity for sex differentiation—should the situation change.

The mechanisms of "covering" sex differentiation are numerous. An emphasis on legal definitions or official ideology may distract attention from actual practice, and the same is true of ritualized selection of women for a small number of official positions.

It may also be suggested that one of the covering processes



is a tendency to increase women's influence in institutions which are, in some respects, becoming obsolete in present-day society.

At the same time as the family has lost its importance as an economic and political institution, egalitarianism between spouses has become increasingly common. Women are today probably the main decision-makers in a large number of families in which the father is a rather absent and diffuse figure. The father's absence is dictated by the demands of his work, which again necessitates the mother's role as decision-maker. Nevertheless, this coincides with the decline of the family as an important social and political unit.

Educational institutions may furnish another example of female influence in obsolete institutions. The first years of elementary schools have—at least in Scandinavia, although similar trends are found in the United States of America<sup>18</sup>—changed over the last decades, from being oriented toward children's acquiring of knowledge to more diffuse purposes of primary socialization and personality formation. At the same time, the male schoolmaster or teacher has moved away from these beginner classes of the elementary school system; female teachers are now in an overwhelming majority as teachers during the first years. Later, when the "real" acquisition of knowledge is in focus, the male teacher takes over. From a strictly educational point of view, the first steps have become, if not obsolete, at least more an extension of the family's primary socialization. The fact that there are a great number of female teachers does not imply that the educational tasks are distributed in an equal manner but, rather, that female teachers continue the mother's family tasks.

One may, finally, consider certain aspects of women's political activity in the light of a hypothesis about female influence in institutions which are in the process of losing influence. In Scandinavian political discussions, it has been recurrently asserted that parliament as an institution is becoming less powerful, that important decisions to an increasing degree are made outside this body, and that the parliament is losing influence vis-à-vis a strong governmental apparatus, as well as powerful economic forces. This seems to be a typical postwar development. It is interesting to note

that at the same time the percentages of women representatives are increasing in all the Scandinavian countries—although slowly. The number of women on the boards of banks, insurance companies, and industrial concerns remains nil.

### *From Unreflectedness to Self-awareness*

With respect to sex roles, the development from traditional to industrialized society is also one from unawareness to self-reflection. This is true in the sense that sex roles in older societies were seen as unproblematic, God-given and unchangeable, whereas the roles today—for example in Scandinavia—represent a constant subject of discussion, of reflection, and also of social research. The description above also suggests that some of the reasons for this change are to be found in the movement from legitimate to illegitimate differentiation. A social differentiation which is declared illegitimate but which nevertheless occurs will be reflected upon by some, although, almost by definition, covered up by others. Today there can be no doubt that the status quo is questioned, discussed, and criticized.

Such awareness of social injustices in certain groups is, however, also a more general characteristic of modern society than of traditional society. The idea that the present is not good enough permeates conservative as well as radical thought in Western society—although the premises for desires for change, as well as the changes advocated, may be quite different. It would be strange indeed if sex differentiation should be exempted from examination in this culture. It may be suggested, nevertheless, that the discrepancies between the criticism and the reality illustrate the status of opinions in current society: the lack of consequences of opinions or ideas held is apparent.

The discrepancies between ideology and reality also indicate a powerlessness on the part of the official authorities in a society. In Scandinavia, most political parties state explicitly their desire to obtain equality between men and woman, but their power to influence the development seems more limited than indicated by their programs. Furthermore, as can be seen in connection with a number of social prob-



lems, a "right" has become something which politicians, administrators, and "the law" would like people to have, not something people have. If this is true, rights may be increasingly generously issued to the losers in current Western society.

### 3 *From Ideological to Psychological Maintenance of Sex Differentiation*

The development from a commonly accepted sex differentiation to an almost illegitimate one has had a number of consequences. One of them is, of course, that legal or open sanctions cannot be brought to bear upon those who deviate from the sex-role pattern. An employer is not free to fire women because they marry, no school or university may bar women's entrance, nobody could formally deny a female politician from running. Formal sanctions have been replaced by informal ones, and this has come to constitute a special pressure on psychological sex differentiation. In traditional society, *ideology, division of tasks, and personality formation* were to some extent harmonized for men and for women to form two distinct patterns of life, one male and one female. In industrialized society, ideology does not justify sanctioning of deviance from the essence of sex differentiation, which is differentiation of tasks. The maintenance of task differentiation has thus become heavily dependent on different personality formation of boys and girls. This does not necessarily mean that the socialization of boys and girls is more segregated now than it was before, but that those differences which are the outcome of socialization have another social significance. Conformity must, for example, be important as a general characteristic.

### 4 *From Supernatural to Rational Premises*

The ideological changes which have accompanied an increasingly urbanized industrialized capitalist society have already been mentioned. The idea of a discrepancy between an official egalitarian ideology and actual differentiating between men and women is seen as an important aspect of sex

roles in current society. The presence of an official egalitarian value system does not imply, however, that the actual practices have no ideological premises. Beliefs in sex differentiation, which are in conflict with the ideas of equality and which are more or less implicitly formulated, may sometimes be found as remnants of previous religious values. But even the ideas that constitute arguments for sex differentiation have undergone changes, in that more rationality, more systematic proofs and sophistication are required of them. When research indicated that the old belief in superior male intelligence had no scientific basis, this was a blow to the arguments for a social differentiation of men and women. Other psychological data have, however, furnished arguments in favor of differentiation; this is the case with research regarding the infant's need for motherly care. In addition, more or less well-founded ideas about psychological sex differences have gained in importance as support for differentiation, whereas religious beliefs have lost much of their force in this respect.

### 5 *From Role Homogeneity to Role Heterogeneity*

The development from manifest to latent sex differentiation has a number of facets, of which only a few may be mentioned here. A shift from cultural homogeneity to cultural heterogeneity with respect to sex roles should, however, not be overlooked. Although in traditional society the substance of sex roles may have varied somewhat within a population, at least they varied in fairly predictable ways. To be a woman in the feudal lower class was probably a fairly well-established role, even if it was somewhat different from the role of an aristocratic lady. Today the variations in sex roles within subgroups are probably considerable, and this is true within and sometimes across class boundaries.

Sex differentiation has, however, always assumed a different character in different social classes and it still does. Liberation is one thing for an educated middle-class woman and another for a working-class wife with only the prospect of unskilled labor if she wants to work outside the home. The trend is, however, to increase women's influx into white-collar jobs and thus to decrease the class differences between women. On the





other hand, new psychological dividing lines are separating women, such as married versus unmarried, or more subtle choices between various versions of the feminine role.

### Shifts in the Domain of Male and Female Value Orientations

There can be no doubt about the fact that the—in a sense somewhat limited—entrance of women into secondary institutions in present-day society has taken place on male premises. Women have accepted the dominant norms and values of secondary affairs, be it “efficiency” or “competition” or “universalism,” and these very values have often in the debates provided the justifications for women’s participation in work, education, and politics. No wonder, then, that male values persist in the face of female participation.

In primary relations, however, there seems to be a decline in the influence of traditional male values. As maintained by Dahlström,<sup>19</sup> a feminization or humanization of the relations in the family, in the classroom, and in the work group may be observed.

The development may thus be interpreted as an increased polarization of male and female values, feminization of primary values being compensated, as it were, by an increased dominance of male values in secondary affairs. If this interpretation is reasonable, it indicates that the structure of primary groups is such that even with an influx of male participation, traditional female orientations not only prevail but are strengthened. In the same vein, the structure of secondary institutions is kept more or less unchanged in the face of increased female participation.

### Strategies of Sex-Role Change

In questions of sex roles and especially changes in sex roles, problems of strategy often take precedence over problems of theory, and sometimes, but not always, to the advantage of the two.

The first question to be asked concerns, of course, the aims of the movements toward equality between men and women. Whereas there is general agreement about the insufficiency

of formal equality, expressed in laws and administrative rules or in “empty rights” of women, the content of equality is still vague.

One may roughly distinguish at least between equality within the framework of the present Western societies, on the one hand, and equality in a radically changed society, on the other. The first may be termed equality on masculine premises, or briefly, “masculine equality”; the other—or others—is equality in a qualitatively different society, that is, a society which is not dominated by masculine values as we know them.

Masculine equality would be a situation accomplished in the present type of economy and political order, expressed as a 50/50 distribution of men and women in almost all positions, be it care of home and children or the business elite. Such a goal, combined with an assumption that present society and institutions remain by and large intact, obviously requires women to become more similar to current masculine ideas of efficiency, profit, competition, and power, according to which Western societies operate. Half the power, so to speak, would have to be handed over to women, with the burden which is implied in male power today—and in the female tasks that would be taken over by men.

The main strategies for attainment of this situation would be awakening of women’s political consciousness and an increase in women’s educational level, but above all an introduction of a number of specific detailed laws and regulations which would secure for women the possibility and ability to compete, fight, and exercise power.

The thesis that obtaining equality is first and foremost a question of women seizing half the power which men now have has a ring of reasonableness, but is nevertheless an expression of a static view.

It is still a question whether equality in a reasonable sense can at all be attained within a society that builds on a capitalist economy, and perhaps at all in a society which is not both socialist and above a certain level of technology. The interests of children as a group would be contradictory to, and heavily set aside under, a combination of market economy



and gender equality. The practicality of full equality under the present economy must be questioned.

A long-range perspective on equality contains the establishment of an economy subordinated to the goal of equality. In addition, a number of political and educational measures would be necessary.

Starting with today's economy, however, and with an eye to the description of sex differentiation offered above, two examples of problems to be attacked may be mentioned. One is the problem of latent or covert sex differentiation; the other consists of breaking the psychological maintenance of sex roles. Both are closely related to the question of women's self-respect and ability to advance their own interest. The covert discrimination leads to a feeling of defeat, since the official rights are all there, and gives the illusion that it is a matter of the single woman's ability and energy to use the rights. The psychological maintenance of sex differentiation also consists of encouraging women's devaluation of themselves in various ways, a devaluation which is clearly reflected in the wages paid for women's work.

The money and prestige paid for one's work are in current society the main road to self-respect for men. Women have been advised to seek their rewards in love and child-rearing, which may be inherently as valuable—if it were paid and respected. To get out of this vicious circle for women, all work with children, especially in child-care institutions, should be paid somewhat more than, say, the production and maintenance of cars. This would increase the self-respect of large groups of women and, in addition, change radically the desirability of child-care work. Such a manifestation of changes in a society's values and priorities would lower the prestige of competitiveness and technological advancement.

Increased higher education for women is another road to changes in women's working conditions and in their self-respect. Various Norwegian data indicate that women with a higher level of education are more politically active, report less submissiveness, less conflict avoidance, and more gender-equalitarian norms than do women with lower education. Higher education may not, however, be especially conducive

to the development of solidarity among women. And higher education alone is not enough for women to gain power.

The analyses in the preceding paragraphs show that the time has come to see the premises on which women work outside the home as more important than such work itself. Work outside the home as a policy must be judged in terms of pressure toward equal wages and working conditions and the avoidance of a female reserve labor force. The question of consequences in terms of solidarity formation on the part of women—and men—is also relevant.

The last point has become very clear in statements from young Western European Marxists: if the struggle for equality between men and women is a struggle *between* men and women, then this would lead to a weakening of the solidarity of the working class and must at present be given low priority. Marxist groups offer other reasons as well for taking a conservative stand in the question of married women's work, such as the extra exploitation of women, and the pressure on men's wages in general.<sup>20</sup>

If sex differentiation and sex discrimination are mainly the results of social forces and not deeply rooted antagonism between men and women, the solidarity between men and women is probably less served by women being isolated housewives than industrial employees. Under certain circumstances, however, men and women will compete for jobs under more equal working conditions, in ways which may decrease their loyalty toward each other. The problem is then more to counteract competition among employees who have long-range interests in common, especially since splits in the labor movement are a much more serious and widespread problem than only the hypothesized conflict between male and female workers. More of a danger to a solidary labor movement lies in the tendency of women to go into low-paid white-collar work which offers little stimulus for consciousness about equality and political work. This too, however, represents a more general problem than women's participation itself.

If the "premises of work" is one strategic point for changing current sex roles, the "premises of consumption" is another. This contains a wide variety of problems related to sex



differentiation, but ultimately it is a question of the direction of production. For example, from the point of view of equality, it is more important to build houses in a new way and on a sufficient scale than to produce a broad range of the commodities which today dominate the consumers and which are necessary for production to be kept up. The housing industry should be nationalized and put in the service of reasonable, more or less collective types of housing, building for flexible families and for the needs of children.

As has been shown by the above summary and elaboration of theoretical descriptions, the breakdown of sex differentiation is not only an economic question. The privatizing and latency of sex roles require a "consciousness-raising," in small groups as well as in the existing women's organizations. In particular, training in groups with young couples who try to share work in a new way should be attempted. It is on this level of attitude changes that the question of cooperation between women and between men and women has a direct bearing.

The point is of special importance, since it is sometimes maintained to be related to the all-important question of women's solidarity toward each other.

Solidarity and identification with one's own and the opposite gender are feelings that obviously are sensitive to social circumstances. The social devaluation and isolation of women have proved dangerous to their solidarity with each other, and their overidentification with man, the stronger, is a problem to any attempt at liberation of women as well as men. Some of these psychological states may be broken down in the individual's work with herself and others, but this will often be a fight against society.

Individual men may be antagonistic to equality between the genders, but even this is a result of social circumstances. The view that the more or less hopeless and bitter fight between man and woman within the four walls of a home can bring about a revolution in sex roles is denied by all reasonable analysis of the forces of revolution as well as of sex differentiation.

The individual consciousness of the problems of sex differentiation is, however, one of the initiators of change and

the consciousness must be brought to bear on social as well as psychological maintenance of the system. The ambivalence of the situation constitutes a temptation to passivity, for the individual man or woman who attempts to change current sex roles moves in a field of ambivalence, not only socially but also psychologically. The tension between practicing equality, which may be the individual's intention (the "project," to use Sartre's word), on the one hand, and his "embeddedness" in past experiences, emotions, learned norms, and values, on the other,<sup>21</sup> is expressed in the institutional setting as well.

## NOTES

1. I am indebted to stud. mag. art. Annemor Kalleberg and stud. mag. art. Lars Hem for discussion and criticism of my views on sex roles and social change.
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