

gender, power and agency

last time, Weston importantly argued:

“Persons do not *possess* gender-typed qualities so much as they *use symbols* to fashion presentations of self that incorporate gender.”

And yet, in everyday practice, many jobs are strongly associated with either men or women

“The conceptual links between gendered traits and job requirements are so powerful that they can influence what men on the job see when they watch a woman work” (142)

what women conceive as calculated troubleshooting procedure can be otherwise read as lack of initiative, “natural aptitude,” or proper style
women’s inability thus becomes self-confirming

the same can be said of racial stereotypes — Nakano Glenn

history of “servitude” traded on racist stereotypes that black women and other women of color were “incapable of governing their own lives and thus were dependent on whites—making white employment of them an act of benevolence” (444)

but lot of work went into fabricating appearance of dependency — such as?

calling domestics by first name, or Anglicizing name, or using generic ‘Maria’
giving domestic’s family cast-of clothes, leftover food
using back door

Yet, at the same time, women and men also make use of gendered stereotypes in ways that can enhance their positions.

Q: To what extent does the strategic use of gendered stereotypes reproduce structural inequalities, symbolic basis of women’s subordination, limits on choice for both women and men? To what extent does the strategic use of gendered stereotypes lead to the exercise of individual choice, personal agency?

this brings us to a key debate in social theory over the relationship between social STRUCTURE and individual AGENCY

to what extent are our actions determined by social norms, peer pressure, institutional constraints (e.g., even in societies that value achieved status, the status of the family one is born into still matters)

Abu-Lughod and Kandiyoti — rethinking the relationship between power (male dominance) and “resistance” (women’s agency)

context for these articles: scholars in the 60s and 70s began to look for examples of how subordinated groups resist dominant power structures, not necessarily through overt rebellion — civil rights movement in US, peasant uprisings in colonial states — but through everyday acts of subordination or a re-interpretation of dominant symbols

ex: “queer” as appropriated by groups who had been stigmatized by this as a derogatory label; same with “black power”

inspired by Michel Foucault: “where there is power, there is resistance” — people aren’t completely bonked over the head by ideology, aren’t completely *passive* in their own lives *even if* politically and economically subordinated

corrective to some socialist feminist analyses that reduce love to ideology (Rapp?)
“false consciousness”

not coincidentally, perhaps, both authors writing about women in Muslim Middle East
why do you think this might be? why perhaps especially important to rethink women’s “resistance” — and how to identify resistance — here?

Let’s start with Kandiyoti’s “**patriarchal bargain**”
what does she mean by this?

Foucault: “every form of power and domination engenders its own forms of resistance”

patriarchy (or better, male dominance) works differently in different places
women’s accommodation to male dominance has thus meant different patriarchal bargains

women’s agency will look different in different contexts — isn’t necessarily going to be about “choice” (chosen marriage, right to choose abortion, etc.)

“classic patriarchy” (see Ehrenreich & English) = law of fathers
for women, what was the classic patriarchal bargain?

exercising power as mothers of sons, rulers of daughters-in-law
generational, kin-based power

Ernestine Friedl (1967) (anthropologist who worked in rural Greece):
“the appearances of [male] prestige can obscure the realities of [female] power”

precisely because women have been denied public prestige, they are free to maneuver behind the scenes to affect outcomes, often through manipulating men — what Abu-Lughod calls “kin-based power” — characterized here as the quintessentially feminine trait of “cunning”

transformations in local power relations will upset patriarchal bargains — may lead women, depending on patriarchal bargains, to adopt seemingly conservative attitudes about change

ex: returning to the veil — Egypt, Turkey (secular states)

new opportunities for women to work outside the home, but need to demonstrate adherence to virtue of feminine modesty — veil allows for modesty in public spaces, allows new social actions to be incorporated into older values — signals that women are still worthy of respect, protection (expression of old values in new social reality — social change isn't all or nothing)

the veil itself isn't a symbol of women's oppression — in fact, many women experience it as just the opposite!

they pity the western woman objectified as sex symbol by strange men

GROUPS: brainstorm patriarchal bargains in other readings, in the US historically or today

strategic use of gender-typed qualities that might give women short-term gains but long-term, could reinforce subordination?

Abu-Lughod — “the romance of resistance” — picks up where Kandiyoti leaves off

inverting Foucault: “where there is resistance, there is power”

resistance against social power (including male dominance) can tell us about *how* power works

Bedouin of Egypt? what “traditional” everyday women's resistances does she describe?

women cover for other women (secrets, silences)

resistance to arranged marriages

“sexually irreverent discourse” – poking fun at male prestige through belittling manhood, sexual basis of male dominance

oral poetry that conveys the sentiments that violate sexual codes of modesty — romantic love

but, again, times are changing — poetry is being recorded almost exclusively by men; as the Bedouin are more sedentary, they're more dependent on cash income and consumer goods

how are women accommodating male dominance within a new consumer society, when they are losing occasions for reciting poetry?

generational resistances: negligees, nail polish – to please husbands sexually

how is this interpreted by older Bedouin women?
how is this interpreted by Abu-Lughod?

parallels with other readings?

with Collier — shift in how gender is used to claim status positions: from
modesty to attractiveness
and Weston — strategic use of gender-typed characteristics

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