

Sapiro, Chapter 4 Commonality and Difference Among Women

“Are the differences between the lives of rich and poor women or Unitarian or fundamentalist Muslims or lesbians and heterosexual women so great that they render our concepts of gender and women useless?” (115)

- 1. Recognizing difference: breaking down the "gender" category with other stratifying categories: race, ethnicity, age, social class, religious belief, etc.**
 - a. Recognizing difference affects the accuracy of any gender-based analysis.
 - i. Wow can we generalize about gender without considering these other factors?
 - b. Recognizing difference has political significance:
 - i. Is gender a binding category, or are women's other differences significant enough to divide them?
 - c. Overall: gender does not affect all women the same way.

- 2. What are some obstacles to recognizing difference? (115-)**
 - a. Early feminists neglected reporting the interaction of other kinds of stratification with gender
 - i. possibly because there have been many factors already to deal with
 - ii. possibly also because early feminists, for one reason or another, have been white middle- and upper-class women
 - b. Women from different cultural backgrounds struggle over whether traditional feminine roles are negative - example, black “matriarchal” households; muslim standards of modesty.

- 3. Dominant System Stereotypes**
 - a. A sex-gender system is composed of rules and norms that determine how male and female, masculinity and femininity are defined; expectations of each gender; and how members of each gender are treated by The Group.
 - b. Dominance is relative: you can be dominant in one context, and not in another.**
 - c. Dominants think of themselves as having no gender, race, age, ethnicity, etc. - as generic.
 - d. Dominant-system stereotypes work positively and negatively
 - i. dualistically, to reward “good” and punish “bad” women
 - ii. to justify and benefit white male dominance
 - (1) For example, the 19thC “domestic angel” stereotype describes/justifies housework - scut work actually done by nondominant laborers - who are possessed of “second-class femininity” (123)
 - iii. are more complex than they first appear, and are largely contextual
 - iv. form a *plurality of gender-based stereotypes* (120) whose dualisms tend to be exaggerated when applied to non-dominant women (blacks, lesbians, asians, etc.)
 - e. Non-dominant system stereotypes sometimes represent women as androgynous, but are usually localized and somewhat dependent on the dominant-system stereotypes

- 4. Four models of how oppression works (124-)**
 - a. **The parallel model** - views/studies characteristics as separate entities (gender or race or class or age, but not interdependent). Tempts researchers to rank these characteristics for “room at the bottom.”
 - b. **The distinct-components or “additive perspective” model** - different aspects of people's backgrounds interact to produce their experience. “White women have only

gender, while black women have gender and race." A predominant approach. But how do you distinguish between the effects of the components?

- c. **The complex model** - depends on individual; doesn't apply to all members of any group; various "components" affect people differently. No such thing as "the black female experience" or "women's role." Sapiro claims the textbook is based on this model.
- d. **The hierarchies of oppression** model - assumes there are certain "master oppressions," usually based on physical characteristics, that trump others. Clinton articulates this when he says "race is the fundamental problem in American culture." If you can't "pass" as dominant, you can't transcend.

5. Considering rape and slavery using a complex model.

- a. both seem based on gender and race respectively, but are intertwined.
- b. you will examine this in your writing for this week!

6. Aspects of unity and diversity.

- a. age
 - i. Women studies, like our culture, privileges youth
 - ii. youth-privileging encourages blindness towards all aspect of women's aging
 - iii. what are the positive aspects of aging?
- b. social class - defined by resource-control and cultural capital
 - i. defined, patriarchally, as father's status
 - ii. since women's work is by definition low-status, women must either attach themselves to men or take on male roles in order to have higher class status
- c. race and ethnicity
 - i. not biological, but culturally defined (examples: Jews and mixed-race children).
 - ii. new stereotypes always arising - cross-fire demands are often double-edged (i.e., the Black superwoman)
- d. geography and culture
 - i. different regions of the US picture womanhood differently (urban v. rural, suburban)
 - ii. categories are always changing, even in a single metropolitan area (compare "suburban" of the late 20th century with "rural" of the late 19th century)

7. Learning from difference

- a. WS must generalize about women without overgeneralizing about "the female experience"
- b. people tend to overgeneralize from personal experience