

A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY
OF GENDER STATUSChristine A Hope
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INTRODUCTION There is disagreement among anthropologists interested in the relative status of women and men in society, as to whether the subordinate status of women is universal. Some say that although there is a small variation, women's subordinate status is a cultural universal (Hammond & Jablow 1976 6; Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974 3; Rosaldo 1974 18; Ortner 1974 67). Others have argued that there is wide variation in the status of women across societies, and that female subordinate status cannot be a cultural universal (Reiter 1975 15; Collier 1974 91; Martin & Voorhies 1975 8). Proponents of both sides try to explain the factors determining women's status within society. Those supporting the view of universal subordinate status of women and the dominant status of men stress the female's reproductive role, with its characteristics of incapacitation, energy drain while nursing, and reduced mobility. Thus, women are relegated to the domestic sphere, while males are left to dominate the public sphere. Since the public sphere activities are most valued in every society, the male is most culturally valued (Quinn 1977). Those arguing for the existence of substantial variation in gender status have pointed to such factors as the subsistence pattern, the relative contribution of each sex to subsistence, and the perceived value of the contribution of each sex to subsistence, technology, and the specific organization of power and authority. As these vary among societies, so does the status of women (Martin & Voorhies 1975; Boserup 1970; Sanday 1973; Kottak 1978).

Research on gender status is beset by several problems. First,

many authors use the term "status" without defining it. Those offering a definition refer to status as the situation of a category of individuals regarding valued commodities, privileges, and powers available in a particular society. People with greater access to these things have high status, and those denied access to them have low status. We use this convention in using the term "status".

A second problem is to operationalize the concept of status. Researchers often use different indicators of status, and thus minimize the comparability of separate studies. The degree of freedom women have to enter into extra-marital affairs, the presence or absence of female solidarity groups, the type of marital residence, the sex of the supreme gods, and the extent to which women are allowed to appear in public, have all been suggested as indicators of women's status (Sacks 1975; Sanday 1973 1964; Divale & Harris 1976; Jopling 1974). The authors seldom make explicit the indicators employed when they use the terms, "women's low status", "male dominance", or "female oppression". However, the problem is not simply the lack of comparability between authors. Quinn, in reviewing the literature, notes that even within the same source, researchers are apt to use different measures of the status of women for different cultural groups (1977 182). Rosaldo uses the lack of prestige attached to the food women grow as an indicator of women's low status in one society, while using customary deference actions of women toward men, such as kneeling, as indicators of women's low status in another society (1974 19). Such flexible indicators give doubtful support to gender status assertions.

A third problem concerns the availability of comparable information from various societies. Since there has been little concern for broadly based cross-

cultural comparisons, information relevant to the gender status question is quite varied in availability and comparability. The problem of unspecified indicators is critical, whether to prove universal subordination of women, or to examine the determinants of variation in status, or to use the relative status of women as an independent variable to explain the presence or absence of other phenomena. A uniform indicator of gender status is necessary before any meaningful hypotheses on the topic can be tested across societies.

GENDER STATUS INDEX

. To solve these problems, we shall create an index containing information that is accessible, applicable to many societies, and pertinent to male/female differences associated with various aspects of life. Such an index should be useful to those interested in the universality or non-universality of female subordination and male dominance, and to those investigating the relationship of gender status to such other societal factors as subsistence patterns, fertility, and attitudes toward pregnancy and childbirth.

. To establish a broad base in the analysis of gender status in society, we used the Cross-Cultural Survey or "CCS" of Textor (1967). The CCS is a precoded data set with information on 400 cultures from around the world. These cultures were selected as representative of those which exist in major geographic areas, rather than as a random sample of all cultures. Clemson University kindly provide funds to purchase the data set.

. Kottak (1978:397) has suggested that we examine the "...behavior, rights, and obligations of men and women...", which was the basis for searching the CCS for coded items on sex differences. While there were several pertinent items, many could not be used

because they concerned only a small number of societies. There were just four items in the Cross-Cultural Summary which indexed male/female differences in a majority of the 400 societies:

1. Inheritance rules for real property (land) favor the male heir or the male line, or the inheritance rules favor other arrangements.

2. Inheritance rules for movable property favor the male heir or male line or the rules favor other arrangements.

3. Marital residence rules specify patrilocal, virilocal, or avunculocal residence or the rules favor other arrangements.

4. Difficulty in obtaining a wife: the means are relatively difficult or the means are relatively easy.

. Items were coded 0 to indicate no favoritism, or 1, indicating favoritism toward males. Summing the four scores provides a range of 0 to 4 for any society. Although rules favoring women over men were possible on items 1, 2, and 3, there was no measure of "difficulty in obtaining a husband." Thus, while the index discriminates between different degrees of male favoritism, there is no such discrimination between levels of female favoritism.

. A total of 88 cultures were excluded due to missing information on two or more of the four items in the index. In the case of 56 cultures with missing information on one of the items, adjustments were made in the index. The procedure was to inspect the available information, and extrapolate from it. The following guidelines were used: If such a culture had a score of 3, with favoritism toward males on all three items, it was scored 4. If the culture had a score of 2, with favoritism toward males on two of the three items, it was scored 3. If the culture had a score of 1, with favoritism toward males on only one of the three items, the score was unchanged. In all cases, the extrapolation was held

consistent with the available information.

RESULTS Table 1 gives the inequality index of gender status in 312 cultures for which the required information was available. In terms of the distribution of each index level, 14% of the cultures scored 0; 16% scored 1; 14% scored 2; 23% scored 3; and 33% scored 4. This indicates that there is much variation in the relative rights of males and females. Most (56%) of the cultures scored favoritism toward the male on at least three items, but 44% failed to demonstrate such a high degree of favoritism.

SUBSISTENCE PATTERNS AND GENDER STATUS

Given the wide spread of scores and the general interest in gender status in different types of cultures, it seemed appropriate to review the types with reference to dominant subsistence patterns, in light of our gender status index, as shown in Table 2. Animal husbandry and intensive agriculture seem to be strongly correlated with favoritism toward the male. In cultures mainly dependent on hunting, fishing, or collecting, the pattern is less clear, but these subsistence patterns tend not to favor males. Incipient food production and simple agriculture display little systematic relationship with gender status. These findings reflect rather accurately the findings of Martin and Voorhies, who used a larger cross-cultural sample, but a less systematic measure of status.

DISCUSSION Despite the general lack of standard measures of gender status, there have been some attempts to systematize the various measures implied by those who have been involved with it. It would be well to fit this index into existing theoretical frames. There are two major sets of distinctions for social domain referring to gender status. These are

the domestic or family domain and the public domain. Theoretically, a person may have high status in one domain and low status in the other, or high or low in both domains. Research indicates that they do not necessarily coincide, and there is speculation that high status in one may preclude high status in the other (Sanday 1974 190). To the extent that the distinction between public and domestic domains is valid, it must be considered in any account of gender status.

. A second distinction pertains to power and deference. As in the case of social domain, respect and power can vary independently. Woman may be accorded great respect, and denied any power, and vice versa. This distinction is important as regards status.

. It would seem logical to construct an index incorporating measures of public and domestic power, and an index of public and domestic respect. This remains to be done. Our index concentrates on the power parameter, and touches both the domestic and public domains, but the indicators of deference available in the Cross-Cultural Survey do not meet the criteria we have adopted.

. With reference to the specific indicators selected, our measures of marital residence and of difficulty in obtaining a wife would seem to affect female power and authority in the domestic domain. Non-male-based residence and easy wife acquisition procedures have been recognized as giving women more freedom of choice of a husband, more protection from a potentially abusive husband, and more freedom to relinquish an unsatisfactory marriage, than do male-based residence patterns and difficult wife acquisition processes (Hammond & Jablow 1976 27).

These are all matters within the domestic domain. Our measures of inheritance of real property and movable property rights, on the other hand, pertain to women's

TABLE 1. INDEX OF GENDER STATUS IN 312 SOCIETIES

1 Abipon	1 Choco	2 Inca	4 Masai
4 Abor	1 Choroti	1 Ingalik	1 Mataco
3 Ainu	1 Chorti	4 Iraqw	4 Maya
3 Akha	3 Chukchee	3 Irish	4 Mbugwe
0 Alacaluf	0 Cochiti	3 Japanese	3 Mbundu
4 Albanians	0 Comanche	0 Javanese	3 Mbuti
4 Amba	3 Coorg	1 Jemez	3 Mende
0 Americans USA	1 Copper Eskimo	4 Kabyle	3 Mentawai
0 Andamanese	4 Cree	4 Kachin	1 Merina
3 Aranda	1 Creek	3 Kalmyk	4 Miao
3 Arapesh	1 Crow	3 Kaska	4 Min Chinese
4 Araucanians	3 Czechs	3 Katab	0 Minangkabau
4 Aryans	4 Dagur	3 Kazak	4 Minchia
2 Ashanti	4 Dard	4 Keraki	1 Miwok
4 Atayal	0 Delaware	3 Ket	0 Mmong Gar
3 Atsugewe	1 Diegueno	4 Khalka	4 Mongo
0 Aweikoma	4 Dilling	0 Khasi	4 Monguor
3 Aymara	0 Dobuans	4 Khevsur	4 Mossi
4 Azande	4 Dogon	4 Kikuyu	2 Mota
3 Aztec	3 Dorobo	0 Kiow-Apache	1 Mundurucu
4 Babwa	2 Dusun	4 Kissi	3 Murngin
1 Bajun	0 Dutch	4 Kohistani	0 Nabesna
4 Bambara	4 Egyptians	4 Koi	2 Nama
4 Bamileke	3 Ellice	3 Konso	4 Nandi
4 Banda	4 Enga	3 Koreans	3 Naskapi
4 Barbara	3 Eyak	4 Koryak	0 Navaho
4 Bari	3 Fang	3 Kpe	1 Ndembu
0 Basques	4 Fon	2 Kuba	3 Ngoni
3 Basseri	1 Fox	2 Kung	0 Nicobarese
4 Batak	4 Futajalonke	0 Kutenai	1 Nomlaki
4 Baya	4 Ganda	3 Kwakiutl	4 Nuer
4 Beja	0 Garo	4 Lakher	2 Nunivak
1 Bemba	3 Gilbertese	1 Lamba	4 Nupe
3 Bergdama	3 Gilyak	4 Lango	4 Nuri
3 Bete	4 Gisu	2 Lapps	3 Nyakyusa
4 Bhil	4 Goajiro	3 Lau	2 Nyaneka
4 Bhuiya	2 Gond	4 Lepcha	3 Nyaro
3 Birifor	2 Gros Ventre	1 Lesu	4 Nyoro
4 Bozo	1 Guahibo	4 Lhota Naga	3 Ojibwa
0 Brazilians	2 Haida	4 Lifu	3 Okinawans
4 Buduma	0 Hano	4 Lolo	2 Omaha
2 Bulgarians	1 Hanunoo	3 Lozi	2 Ona
0 Burmese	4 Hasania	4 Luba	4 Oraon
3 Cagaba	2 Havasupai	4 Luo	1 Paez
2 Camayura	0 Hawaiians	4 Maguzawa	2 Paiwan
1 Camba	4 Hazara	4 Malays	3 Palauans
2 Cambodians	4 Hebrews	3 Mam	2 Papago
4 Chagga	4 Hehe	4 Mambila	4 Pathan
3 Chenchu	2 Herero	4 Manchu	0 Pawnee
0 Cheremis	4 Ho	0 Mandan	1 Pende
4 Cherkess	1 Huichol	1 Manus	3 Penobscot
0 Cheyenne	1 Hukundika	1 Maori	0 Ponapaens
4 Chibcha	2 Hutsul	4 Margi	3 Popoluca
3 Chinantec	0 Iban	1 Maricopa	4 Purari
0 Chir-Apache	3 Icelanders	1 Marquesans	4 Purum
4 Chiriguano	2 Ila	1 Marshallese	0 Raroians

TABLE 1. INDEX OF GENDER STATUS IN 312 SOCIETIES (Continued)

4 Regeibat	1 Subanum	3 Tikopia	3 Venda
4 Riffians	4 Swazi	1 Timbira	1 Vietnamese
0 Romans	1 Tagbanua	0 Timucua	4 Wantoat
3 Rundi	1 Talamanc	3 Tiv	0 Washo
3 Rwala	4 Tallensi	3 Tiwi	1 Wichita
0 Sagada	2 Tanala	2 Toda	3 Wogeo
4 Sandawe	4 Tanimbarese	0 Tokelau	4 Wolof
2 Sanpoil	1 Tarahumara	3 Tolowa	4 Wute
4 Santal	2 Tareumiut	1 Toraja	2 Yagua
3 Saramacca	4 Teda	0 Tristan	2 Yahgan
2 Sarsi	1 Teheulche	1 Trobriand	3 Yako
1 Semang	2 Tenda	2 Trukese	2 Yakut
2 Seri	2 Tenetehara	1 Trumai	0 Yao
4 Shilluk	1 Tenino	2 Tshimshian	3 Yapese
4 Shluh	4 Tera	2 Tabatulabal	2 Yaruro
1 Sinhalese	0 Terena	3 Tucano	1 Yokuts
0 Siriono	4 Teso	3 Tucuna	2 Yombe
2 Siuai	3 Teton	4 Turkana	4 Yoruba
4 Siwans	0 Thai	1 Twana	2 Yukagir
4 Somali	0 Thai	2 Ulawans	1 Yuki
4 Songhai	3 Tibetans	0 Ute	3 Yurok
3 Sotho	3 Tigrinya	3 Vedda	1 Zuni

TABLE 2. PRIMARY SUBSISTENCE PATTERNS BY GENDER STATUS SCORE*

Gender Status Score	Hunting	Fishing	Col-lecting	Incipient Food Pro-duction	Simple Agri-culture	Animal Husbandry	Intensive Agri-culture	Total
0	7	6	2	5	8	0	10	38
1	4	7	9	7	15	0	7	49
2	6	8	3	6	11	3	5	42
3	4	13	7	5	16	5	14	64
4	0	3	1	5	32	6	43	90
Total	21	37	22	28	82	14	79	283

rights, with accompanying potential power and authority in the public domain.

The only comparable index of women's status which we have found was first presented by Sanday (1973:1682). Our index improves on that of Sanday in two ways. First, it includes items dealing with both the domestic and the public domains of power. Second, our index has much broader applicability, since the information is based on a large number of cultures. While Sanday's items are more direct measures of power and authority, only twelve cul-

tures were included in her index, compared to 312 in the present study. In the future, it may be possible to construct a more comprehensive index, dealing with both respect and power, in both the public and the domestic domains. Meanwhile, the index we have constructed has potential for testing hypotheses using gender status either as an independent or a dependent variable, in the context of the Cross-Cultural Summary data set.

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