CONTEMPORARY NATIVE WOMEN: ROLE FLEXIBILITY AND POLITICS

Bruce G. Miller
University of British Columbia

Abstract: Some recent efforts to reconceptualize contemporary Native gender systems (1) argue that tribal and band political life is best understood by reference to social formations other than gender systems and (2) rely on poorly defined notions of one feature of the gender system, role flexibility. This article argues that these two issues are connected; differences in role flexibility by sex help channel the political participation of men and women. Several notions of role flexibility, each with different properties and implications for women's political role, are employed in the literature. A comparative framework of role flexibility is constructed, building on the work of Kopytoff (1991), and ethnographic examples are used to build the case that the analysis of gender (including role flexibility) is important in understanding Native women's recent successes in politics.

Résumé: Des efforts récents pour reconceptualiser les systèmes génériques chez les autochtones contemporains (1) argumentent que la vie politique tribale et de bande peut mieux s'expliquer si on fait référence aux formations sociales autres que celles des systèmes génériques. De plus, (2) cette vie politique tribale et de bande repose sur des notions mal-définies d'un aspect du système générique, à savoir la flexibilité des rôles. Cet article suggère que ces deux problèmes sont reliés : les différences dans la flexibilité des rôles par le sexe aide à canaliser la participation politique des hommes et des femmes. Dans la littérature, on trouve plusieurs mentions des diverses notions de la flexibilité des rôles, chacune ayant des propriétés et des implications pour le rôle politique des femmes. On peut ainsi construire un cadre comparatif de la flexibilité des rôles, basé sur les travaux de Kopytoff (1991). De plus, des exemples ethnographiques sont présentés pour montrer que l'analyse générique (flexibilité des rôles incluse) est capitale pour la compréhension des récents succès politiques des femmes autochtones.

An interesting problem in the literature on Native North Americans is understanding how aboriginal gender systems have been transformed in the post-

***Anthropologica* XXXVI (1994) 57-72**

contact period, an effort made difficult by inadequate knowledge of pre-contact gender systems. One key aspect of these transformations is the focus of this article: scholars have been struck by the assumption of important political and economic roles in Native communities by women in the second half of the 20th century (Albers 1989 reviews this literature). Perhaps the most visible emerging position in clarifying the connections between gender and political and economic life is to argue that gender is not necessarily useful as a category of analysis, because gender is constructed fundamentally differently in Native communities than in non-Native communities; because gender is not a superordinate status in Native communities; because Native communities frequently are egalitarian and structured around kin and not gender relations; and because changes in political life and in the allocation of work are not regarded as gendered issues by Natives themselves. For example, Albers (1989:160) argued that "many forms of work and leadership are not sex-typed in a fixed and narrow way." As an indication of this, she (ibid.:136) noted that "Importantly, when people achieved a prestige through channels most often utilized by the opposite sex, it was not perceived as a threat to established notions of femininity or masculinity (Spindler and Spindler 1979:36-37; Whitehead 1981:104-109)." Gender and other social roles are apparently not in conflict in such cases. Bourque and Warren, in describing the nature of sex roles in an egalitarian society, suggested that individual traits outweigh sex-linked traits in political life: "Sex roles, to the extent that they were marked at all, would be highly flexible and individually variable. In such a society, competence, and not sex, would determine how decisions are made, resources allocated, and activities undertaken" (1981:48). Initially scholars have benefited from the realization that the nature of Western gender systems, with highly partitioned male and female roles, has created difficulties in understanding fundamentally different Native systems. This realization led correctly to questioning whether an emphasis on gender in generating new explanations of Native social organization would produce the insights it has for Western societies. Such a position can mislead as well as enlighten, however, and I argue that in some communities contemporary Native political life cannot be understood without accounting first for gender, and cannot be explained adequately by reference to other social processes and institutions. This article is intended as a corrective. I do this, in part, by examining whether individual traits outweigh sex-linked traits in political life, and whether Native women have moved into new political and economic roles without drawing reactions in their communities. I suggest that in some cases debate on women's political role is not carried out publicly, but nonetheless is significant. In any event, not all Native communities are egalitarian, and material drawn from non-egalitarian societies of the northwest coast shows variability in the communities' responses to women in political life.

Understanding women's participation in political life begins with clarifying whether political tasks are allocated by gender and (1) if they are, whether for ideological or pragmatic reasons, and (2) the circumstances under which men and women take on tasks ordinarily carried out by the other sex. Many of the current reconceptualizations of North American Indian societies attempt to answer these questions by employing some notion of role flexibility (Kidwell 1975; Albers 1983, 1985, 1989; Knack 1989; Fiske 1989; Powers 1986; Medicine 1983; Klein 1976, 1980; Ackerman 1988; Schlegel 1977; Maynard 1979; McElroy 1979; Whitehead 1981; Blackman 1982; Brown 1982; and Kehoe 1973 employ some variant of this concept as do Bourque and Warren 1981, quoted above). But clarifying whether there is some sort of culturally acceptable flexibility in the way in which women carry out their tasks is just a start towards examining women's political participation. Native economic and political systems have not all been transformed in the same ways and some of the differences can be understood by examining specific, localized properties of gender role flexibility. The primary aim of this article is to clarify the otherwise impossibly vague concept of role flexibility so that it may be used comparatively in the analysis of women's changing political and economic roles, and a framework is developed here to facilitate these comparisons. This enterprise begins with a consideration of suggestive recent work by Kopytoff.

Structural Models of Gender Role Flexibility

Kopytoff (1991) argued for the importance of a distinction between existential (or immanent) identity, defined as a state of being locally regarded as natural, and role-based social identity, which is derived from the actions performed by individuals. In Kopytoff's view, women are less likely to assume formal political office in societies where the existential features of femininity are associated with a large inventory of behaviours than they are in societies where women's activities are amenable to negotiation and variability. He noted, as has been noticed about Native peoples of North America (Miller 1989; Green 1980; Albers 1989), the relatively high incidence of women in supposedly "non-progressive," non-Western societies who have taken on political roles in post-colonial regimes. Kopytoff found in Zaire that "among the Usu, few immanent roles were specifically linked to the man or the woman *qua* existential identities" (1991:81).

Kopytoff's distinctions suggest that social identities, including gender identity, can be regarded as having either the property of "immanence" or of "circumstantiality." Other sets of mutually exclusive properties of gender identities can be derived from this conceptualization and are noted in Table 1.

Kopytoff's work depends on the analysis of gender roles as well as identity. Gender roles are, in some cases, linked to particular personality configurations, in Linton's (1945:130) terms, "status-personalities," or in Kopytoff's

terms, "identity-personalities" (1991:88). Gender roles can have either specific linked character traits or be relatively unmarked, or "non-characterological." Schematically, the four logical possibilities generated by such an approach are as follows in Table 2.

Table 1
Opposed Properties of Gender Identity

immanent	circumstantial
non-negotiable	negotiable
permanent	provisional-changeable
self-justified	justifiable
essential	constructed
regarded as natural	regarded as cultural
global	compartmentalized: embedded in one of several local systems

Table 2
Logical Possibilities of Properties of Gender Roles

Gender roles have the property of either:		
(a) immanence	or	(b) circumstantiality
if immanent, then either:		if circumstantial, then:
1. immanent-characterological		1. unmarked
or		or
2. immanent-unmarked		2. circumstantial-marked

The fourth logical possibility (circumstantial-marked) does not arise in practice and circumstantial roles cannot be characterological. A negotiable gender role might be associated with particular traits of personality, but these traits, by definition, would not be identified as male or female.

Kopytoff's concepts may be applied to understanding relative differences in role flexibility by sex and role conflict and ultimately to clarifying the issue which motivated Kopytoff's work, the participation of women in political systems. Kopytoff's analysis stops short, however, of examining the historical conditions under which women's political participation occurs. It may not be enough simply to note that women are not stopped simply for reasons of their sex, especially since there is considerable local variation in women's participation in formal political structures. Indeed, historical factors and the nature of the gender systems in some locations actually facilitate the entry of women into political life (Miller 1992).

To summarize, Table 2 identified three types of gender roles: those which are immanent and characterological; those which are immanent but unmarked; those which are circumstantial. Each of these types can have flexibility, but the

properties of flexibility can be quite different. These types are represented in Table 3.

Table 3
Ideal Types of Gender Roles and Associated Properties of Flexibility

Type		Properties
A	Immanent-characterological	Legitimize new roles Disqualify from new roles Long-term flexibility only
B	Immanent-unmarked	Long-term flexibility
C	Circumstantial	Situational or long-term flexibility

Type A roles are non-negotiable but still have one sort of flexibility because such roles could legitimize new roles, which then become linked to the already established ones. Because Type A roles are connected to personality trait configurations, and because new activities require some selection of who will carry them out, they act to channel new roles to particular categories of social actors. Just as some personality types are thought to be appropriate for the new role, so too will other personality types be thought of as inappropriate. Type A role flexibility can be called long-term in that individuals do not negotiate new dimensions of their sex role, but members of groups may take on new activities over time only on the grounds of compatibility with pre-existing roles or through a process of analogical reasoning or role generalization. A hypothetical example of this is an association between bureaucratic activities, a new activity and women of a particular age group because of immanent, personality-linked characteristics (such as women are persistent and patient). Other groups, perhaps men, might be disqualified because of their personality-linked characteristics which are thought to be incompatible.

Type B, immanent-unmarked roles, also contain non-negotiable central features, but are not associated with particular personality traits. There are no such traits, as in Type A, which allow association with new social functions. On the other hand, there are no personality configurations associated with Type B roles that disqualify anyone from the assumption of new roles. By definition, situational role flexibility is not possible, but long-term flexibility is not precluded. A hypothetical example is the gradual linking of new mass communication activities with men because the existing division of labour makes the scheduling of such work much easier for men than for women.

Type C, circumstantial roles, have few or no associated personality traits and are individually negotiable, permitting both situational and long-term flexibility. There can be the gradual identification of individuals occupying a

particular status (incumbents of a particular cluster of roles) with a new activity and also the idiosyncratic usurpation of newly created roles by individuals.

The model of roles can be improved by incorporating further features, having specified the nature of the flexibility available to the three types of ideal gender roles. First, and most importantly, some gender systems are bifurcated (the property of role flexibility applies to one gender only); second, the degree of role flexibility may be variable; and, third, the likelihood of flexibility over the life course of individuals may be variable. Adding these three variables to the model yields Table 4.

Table 4 indicates that gender systems, in theory, are rather different in how the property of role flexibility is embedded in the gender system. But, in addition to the variation in the operation of gender systems, there is variation in how scholars have employed the concept of gender role flexibility, and thereby how they explain women's political role. Four ethnographic examples are used to show how these different approaches yield different outcomes.

Table 4
Ideal Role Types and Associated Variables

Type	A	B	C
Type of flexibility	long-term	long-term	situational, long-term
Degree of flexibility	undetermined	undetermined	high
Bifurcation	possible	possible	possible
Individual flexibility (innovation)	unlikely	possible	required
Change over life course	possible	possible	likely

Ethnographic Examples

Klein (1976, 1980, n.d.) explained the important contemporary political role of Tlingit women by reference to gender egalitarianism. She noted the regular participation of Tlingit women in office holding, specifying that 46 percent of Tlingit office holders, 1971-74, were women (1976:178). She argued that the Tlingit are an important example of a ranked society where "the issue of gender is not a primary consideration in issues of power and authority" (n.d.:2). Instead, other factors are important, most notably kinship, wealth and ability. People are said to relate to each other simultaneously as relatives within a matrilineal clan system and as ranked individuals. The ranking system cannot separate the social realities of men and women because it is not done in other social domains. This is a Type C argument (see Table 3). Klein makes a case for circumstantial gender roles, and especially the ability of women to manoeuvre situationally; there is no real need for long-term role flexibility to fa-

cilitate women's political roles. Women's political participation does not depend on being legitimized by either (1) local notions of an overlap between the personality types of political actors and women or (2) by a gradual extension of domestic responsibilities to the political domain. Klein was interested in insuring that her work be clearly distinguished from explanations based on simple domestic-public dichotomies. She noted:

> While I have shown that the contemporary Tlingit woman's position is compatible with her traditional economic role, the modern female roles are not simply extensions of internal family roles. The school and school board, for example, which have the care and education of children as their primary aim, are and were traditionally the responsibility of men as well as of women. . . . More importantly, by consigning an association such as the school board to a "supra-domestic" domain rather than a public or jural domain, important jural and political functions can be obscured. (1976:179)

In an interesting passage, Klein suggested that the way women operate politically is much like that of men, again focussing on the idea that gender largely does not matter (although Klein pointed out that women are better fundraisers for the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood [ibid.:177]):

> The two major town politicians at the time of the study were a man and a woman, both of whom held major elective offices. Both shared the important skills and traits mentioned above. They attended most meetings, sponsored individuals for appointments and jobs, and were sought for information by individuals. Their networks overlapped. . . . Both excelled in dealing with the outside powers. (Ibid.:177)

Contrast Klein's explanation of women's political role with that provided for another community where women have an important and regular role in elected tribal life. Albers (1983) described the changing circumstances of Siouan woman from a political economy perspective. She found Devil's Lake Sioux women's wage labouring income in the recent reservation period to have been more stable than men's and at least on a par in size. Also, women were better able to take advantage of newly created tribal job categories. As a result, in many cases women have been better able than men to make substantial contributions to the household, and women's influence has risen in day-to-day decision making. In such cases, women served as the nucleus of a kin-based support network, and controlled the distribution of provisions others depend on. These women also had influence in the important ceremonial life. Albers wrote: "To a large extent, tribal politics and domestic politics are the same. . . . The issues that tribal leaders have been faced with in recent years are dominated by domestic concerns that have been critical to both men and women" (ibid.:217). Albers added that the ascendancy of female influence

depends on historic patterns of mutual sharing and egalitarian values. Neither sex controlled the labour or produce of the other.

My reading of Albers' argument is that it also employed a Type C notion of role flexibility, although it differs from Klein's by emphasizing the connection of political and domestic life and by showing explicitly those economic factors that circumstantially and locally increase and diminish the contribution of women to family networks. As a consequence of their contributions to these networks, women have been elected to tribal office in significant numbers, a major departure from the 1950s when women had virtually no access to formal political positions. Albers demonstrated that it is not sufficient to argue that egalitarian values alone will guarantee that there will be a number of female formal political leaders. Klein's work suggests that women always have had a direct voice in public affairs, while Albers emphasized ups and downs. It is not clear under what circumstances Tlingit women have been or might be disengaged from public life, and data from council elections in earlier periods (when the local economy may have differentially advantaged men as it did elsewhere) could help resolve in what way gender is a relevant variable in the Tlingit case.

Put into the framework developed here, Klein's argument suggests that political roles are not associated with gender-linked personality configurations. Albers' analysis ties gender indirectly to politics, but not as a Type A issue, that is, politics is not tied to personality traits which are themselves associated with one sex. Neither men nor women are inherently disqualified from political life (or presumably most other activities) by virtue of their sex. Albers did not emphasize the actions taken by individual women in moving into political life, but showed that influence in family networks is actively translated into political influence. Albers described the connections between domestic and public politics quite differently than Klein in emphasizing that women take care of family business in the public sector. The works of Albers and Klein, although different in emphasis, both advance the view that gender is of limited analytic importance and that access to public office is largely determined along other lines.

Powers' (1986) work added another wrinkle by describing contemporary Oglala Sioux men's and women's gender roles as differing in flexibility. She pointed to the differential impact of contact with Euroamericans for men and women (as does Albers), and argued that women have fared better under reservation life than men, and that men have suffered greater identity dislocation and role loss (ibid.:3). In the contact period, gender complementarity matched the egalitarian values, and while these values persist to the present, the differential role flexibility has enabled Oglala women to move relatively more successfully both within Indian society and the surrounding society. Powers wrote that

> the successful Oglala woman glides along a most precarious continuum, back and forth from behaving as the ideal wife and mother whose role it is, as in the old days, to carry out the dictates of the White Buffalo Calf Woman—to reproduce and to nurture future generations of Oglala people, male and females. But she will also have the capacity to occupy the same positions as a male with respect to community, district, and tribal activities and programs recognizing that men will not compete with her for female roles and responsibilities. (Ibid.:212)

Oglala women, as seen in this analysis, are more successfully bicultural than men. In addition,

> In either case, a high value is placed on women's roles as wife and mother. A number of traditional women move freely along a continuum between what might be regarded as high-status Euroamerican positions (judge of the Oglala tribal court) and traditional high-status Native American positions (wife and mother) simultaneously and without conflict. (Ibid.:2)

In Powers' analysis, the nature of Oglala women's gender roles enabled women to more successfully make situational and long-term changes, individually and collectively. Put into the terms employed here, women's gender roles are generally Type C (circumstantial) and men's Type A (immanent and characterological). Powers wrote:

> women's participation in what are regarded as Euroamerican occupations in no way impinges on or detracts from their traditional roles, since in Lakota culture maternal and managerial roles are not regarded as antithetical. . . . However, these options are not so readily available to Oglala men. Those who occupy high-status positions (in the tribal council, for example) are usually criticized for behaving like white men. (Ibid.:3)

In sum, Powers' argument suggested that traditional maternal roles facilitate present-day managerial roles. While women can move into male domains, men cannot move into women's. The characterological quality of men's roles—their identification with specific personality traits—disqualifies men from women's activities. This is quite different than arguing that men do not object to women assuming positions that women previously had not occupied, the Kopytoff, Albers and Klein position. Powers is employing a very different notion of role flexibility.

A still different type of argument is employed to explain the same outcome, the recent high levels of participation of women in economic and political activity, in yet another Indian population, the Coast Salish of western Washington State and British Columbia (Miller 1989, 1992). The Coast Salish materials point to other relevant issues: namely, the significance of changes in role flexibility over the life course and the importance of individual innovators.

Although both the Tlingit and Coast Salish are regarded by anthropologists as peoples of the northwest coast culture area, Coast Salish women, unlike the

Tlingit, have not moved into new political and economic roles without commentary or disruption. Snyder (1964) described the contact period, female gender role of the Coast Salish people occupying the Skagit Valley of northwestern Washington State as ambiguous and with internally inconsistent demands. This ambiguity allowed women to take on part of the male role without being regarded as masculine. The male gender role, in contrast, was rather more rigid:

> ... the social system permitted women to achieve almost unlimited status and authority. But natives' generalizations about women's status as insignificant, the payment of a bride-price—which was unequivocally regarded as a purchase, and other explicit features of culture were in conflict with the actual functioning of society.... Myth and tale content about women reveal tension unequalled anywhere in the literature ... but no other topics are so colored by hostility as those which represent attitudes towards females.... Analysis shows not only that a bewilderingly ambiguous situation existed, but more significantly, that feelings about women's roles were nearly explosive. (Ibid.:255-256)

Women were free to seek, or not seek, important spirit powers, and, unlike men, failure to obtain such powers did not reflect poorly on women. The lesser role women played in the religious system allowed them to "be passive when they chose to conform to the ideal feminine role" (ibid.:285), and, furthermore, they "could approach an ideal in supernaturalism stated for both sexes even though it conflicted with the specifically feminine ideal" (ibid.). Successful women could play the issues around spirit acquisition either way, but successful men could not.

Some post-menopausal women validated men's spirit powers and played public political roles, and in this circumstance, rank and age is more important than gender in the assignment of role (ibid.), although all of this is an aspect of the gender system itself. As Klein (1980) found with the Tlingit, women inherited family status equally with male relatives and could call upon the resources and labour of relatives as did males. But women had greater role flexibility than men, and were freer to innovate according to their personal inclinations and abilities. Gender more fully channelled the activities of men than women, but at a price. Snyder noted: "A woman, however, if she excelled or could dominate, created confusion in the hearts of others" (1964:375).

As in Powers' analysis, male and female gender roles diverged in type. Men's gender role was Type A (immanent and characterological) and, for some women at least, Type C (circumstantial). In Powers' analysis, Sioux women were more successfully bicultural than the Siouan men, and the same argument can be made for the Coast Salish, although the sources of Siouan and Coast Salish women's successes may be different. Powers argued that the post-contact period was relatively more disruptive for men. In the Coast Salish case the opposite was the case and for the most part the women have been

more disadvantaged by contact than the men (Miller 1989). Consequently, in understanding current gender systems and political roles the focus is best placed on women's innovativeness (situational flexibility) rather than on men's disenfranchisement.

In the late 20th century Coast Salish male and female gender roles still are of different types, even though a great deal of change has occurred since treaties were signed in the U.S. portions of Coast Salish country in the 1850s, and in many ways the gender system of today more closely approximates that of the contact period than the periods in between. As Albers found among Devil's Lake Sioux women, Coast Salish women once again make contributions to the domestic economy that equal or surpass that of men, women frequently control the distribution of important resources and are no longer so heavily circumscribed in the scope of their activities by the White world. Unlike the early and middle part of this century, women now play an important elective political role, although as Albers (1985) found among the Sioux, this varies inversely with the stability of male income; it also varies with the size of the tribe or band (Miller 1992). Although women had been almost completely excluded from public office in earlier decades, in 12 Coast Salish tribes of Puget Sound, Washington state, women held 41 percent of tribal council seats during the 1962-87 period. Fifty Coast Salish bands of British Columbia elected women to 28 percent of council seats in 1991-92, compared to 6.5 percent in the 1950s (Miller 1992).

Present-day Salish women manifest this differential role flexibility both situationally and through the long-term incorporation of activities new to the society into the domain of women's roles. First, to many women, present-day political activity is linked to the fulfillment of responsibilities to family. Second, women have assumed the bulk of the responsibility for dealing with the outside world: women act as bankers, deal with schools and agencies, and so on; prior responsibilities for the family could be said to legitimize women's new responsibilities. But the existential properties of femininity in some cases have become linked with the modern-day requirements of political life. Women's roles, to this degree, could even be said to be becoming marked or characterological (ibid.). In one Coast Salish tribe, a clear link has developed between traits regarded by both men and women as identifiably female and political life, and the council has elected a majority of women since the 1970s; in a second tribe, there is no association between femininity and politics and few women win election; in a third, the vast majority of councillors since 1986 are women, after decades of almost exclusively male authority, but an association between women and politics has not developed (ibid.). The local systems of gender attribution are clearly important in these cases, and any analysis missing this factor would be inadequate. Unlike the Tlingit case, the social

realities of men and women are separable and gender is not subsumed by other social domains as an organizing principle.

Coast Salish women's movement into political life has not occurred without drawing reactions, and some responses bring to mind the "explosive" reactions said to occur when contact-period Skagit women assumed political importance late in life (Snyder 1964). Perhaps the clearest evidence of a response to a majority of women in public office has been the subsequent decline of voting participation by men over 55 in one Coast Salish tribe for which voting records have been analyzed (Miller 1989). Interview data show that many of these men regarded women as inappropriate for elected positions and women's presence a factor in their alienation from their own government. Council women have described the hostility and belittlement they face when dealing with men from all or largely male tribal councils, and council men have described their discomfort in serving with women. Perhaps because of Coast Salish emphasis on personal autonomy (Amoss 1978), opposition to women in politics is not expressed openly and is only apparent after careful scrutiny. The feelings are quite real, nevertheless.

Conclusion

Kopytoff reported the circumstantial (non-characterological) nature of existential womanhood in several African societies. In the absence of any rigid behavioural entailments of womanhood, carrying out new activities does not conflict with any associated personality requirements. Women are not kept from participation in public life because of any gender attributions (such as "women are docile," for example) which might be in conflict with the personality requirements of another role which may require assertiveness. Rather, in this view, only pragmatic role-conflicts, and not immanent features of gender, restrain individuals circumstantially.

Kopytoff (1991) presented as evidence in support of his analysis the ease by which some African women have changed significant features of their roles:

> The significance of the free woman lies in showing the ease with which an apparently radical transformation of women's roles can occur by what is in fact a slight variation in role shedding and role acquisition . . . more recently they have taken these transformations in new directions—into the professions, the bureaucracy, and politics. They perform these new roles with little evidence of being victims of the kind of wrenching role conflicts that so often accompany the careers of their Western . . . sisters. These transformations have taken place without any notable public debate in most African societies.

But the circumstances Kopytoff described do not apply to all of Native North America, as the foregoing examples show, and one might conclude that it is essential to know more about local gender ideology, especially as it relates to role flexibility. The ethnographic examples given here are not meant to ex-

haustively catalogue gender systems and their implications for politics. Although, so far, only male roles were characterized as immanent-characterological (Type A), examples of societies with female Type A roles can be found. Kehoe described the Plains Cree women's roles this way: "the capacity of maternity is the key attribute for defining women. This metonymic usage has stereotyped and restricted women's roles, specifically by preventing women from attaining the most prestigious healers' roles."

Because of these differences in the internal organization of Native societies, it cannot be argued that women's movement into political life occurs everywhere without dispute, as the Coast Salish case shows. Instead, the processes of change in Native communities, including changes in the roles of men and women, are properly viewed as highly localized, even within a single culture. The quite different findings of Powers and Albers, summarized in Table 5, may be attributable to differences between Oglala and Devil's Lake Sioux communities, but it is equally possible that emphases on different issues has produced differing versions of the nature of gender systems and women's political participation.

Table 5
Comparative Gender Role Attributes

Attribute	Tlingit	Salish	Sioux (Powers)	Sioux (Albers)
Bifurcation	no	yes	yes	no
Type of flexibility	situational	situational long-term, women only	women only	long-term, situational
Degree of flexibility	high	high-women low-men	high-women low-men	high
Individual flexibility	yes	yes-women no-men	yes-women no-men	yes
Change over life cycle	?	yes, women	?	?

In comparing the Tlingit, Coast Salish and Sioux, a key difference is whether men's and women's gender roles are bifurcated, thereby allowing differences in role flexibility in the recent period. In the Coast Salish case, and in Powers' treatment of the Sioux, there apparently is such bifurcation. In Albers' treatment of the Sioux and Kopytoff's analysis of the Suku, bifurcation is not a factor. All of these societies have, at present, significant numbers of women in important political and economic positions, but not all are egalitarian, nor have women gained such positions historically or assumed important positions without comment. The presence of such variability suggests that

the way a gender system is constituted, especially differences in role flexibility by gender (and the accompanying differences in long-term and individual flexibility, the degree of flexibility and the changes over the life course) must be accounted for in the analysis of women's contemporary political and economic role. This is not to argue for a sort of "gender-role determinism" of political life, and, of course, the ideologies underlying gender roles are themselves amenable to change. Rather, the argument is that an assertion of an unproblematic movement of women into new political roles is misleading. A division of societies into two types—Western ones with relatively rigid gender boundaries and a heavy reliance on gender in organizing political and economic life and indigenous ones with permeable gender boundaries and reliance on other social institutions to organize political life—obstructs analysis of contemporary change.

References Cited

Ackerman, Lillian A.
1988 Sexual Equality on the Colville Indian Reservation in Traditional and Contemporary Contexts. *In* Women in Pacific Northwest History: An Anthology, edited by Karen J. Blair, pp. 152-169. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Albers, Patricia
1983 Sioux Women in Transition: A Study of Their Changing Status in Domestic and Capitalist Sectors of Production. *In* The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women, edited by Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, pp. 175-234. Lanham Park, MD.: University Press of America.
1985 Autonomy and Dependency in the Lives of Dakota Women: A Study in Historical Change. Review of Radical Political Economics 17:109-134.
1989 From Illusion to Illumination. *In* Gender and Anthropology, edited by Sandra Morgen, pp. 132-170. Washington: American Anthropological Association.

Amoss, Pamela
1978 Coast Salish Spirit Dancing: The Survival of an Ancestral Religion. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Blackman, Margaret B.
1982 During My Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, a Haida Woman. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Bourque, Susan C., and Kay Barbara Warren
1981 Women of the Andes: Patriarchy and Social Change in Two Peruvian Towns. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Brown, Judith K.
1982 Cross-cultural Perspectives on Middle-aged Women. Current Anthropology 23(2):143-156.

Fiske, Jo-anne
1989 Gender and Politics in an Indian Community. Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia.

Green, Rayna
1980 Native American Women. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 7:248-267.

Kehoe, Alice B.
1973 The Metonymic Pole and Social Roles. Journal of Anthropological Research 27: 266-274.

Kidwell, Clara Sue
1975 The Power of Women in Three American Indian Societies. Journal of Ethnic Studies 6:113-121.

Klein, Laura
1976 "She's One of Us, You Know," The Public Life of Tlingit Women: Traditional, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives. The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology 6(3):164-183.
1980 Contending with Colonization: Tlingit Men and Women in Change. *In* Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives, edited by Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock, pp. 88-108. New York: Praeger.
n.d. Mother as Clanswoman: Rank and Gender in Tlingit Society. Ms.

Knack, Martha C.
1989 Contemporary Measures of Southern Paiute Women and the Measurement of Women's Economic and Political Status. Ethnology 28(3):233-248.

Kopytoff, Igor
1991 Women's Roles and Existential Identities. *In* Beyond the Second Sex: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender, edited by Peggy Reeves Sanday and Ruth Gallagher Goodenough, pp. 77-98. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Linton, Ralph
1945 The Cultural Background of Personality. New York: Appleton-Century.

Maynard, Eileen
1979 Changing Sex Role and Family Structure among the Oglala Sioux. *In* Sex Roles and Changing Cultures, edited by A. McElroy and C. Matthiasson, pp. 11-20. Occasional Papers in Anthropology No. 1. Buffalo: Department of Anthropology, State University of New York at Buffalo.

McElroy, Ann
1979 The Negotiation of Sex-Role Identity in Eastern Arctic Culture Change. *In* Sex Roles and Changing Cultures, edited by A. McElroy and C. Matthiasson, pp. 49-60. Occasional Papers in Anthropology No. 1. Buffalo: Department of Anthropology, State University of New York at Buffalo.

Medicine, Beatrice
1983 "Warrior Women"—Sex Role Alternatives for Plains Indian Women. *In* The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women, edited by Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, pp. 267-280. Lanham: University Press of America.

Miller, Bruce G.
1989 A Sociocultural Explanation of the Election of Women to Formal Political Office: The Upper Skagit Case. Ph.D. dissertation, Arizona State University.

1992 Women and Politics: Comparative Evidence from the Northwest Coast. Ethnology 26(3):367-385.

Powers, Marla N.

1986 Oglala Women: Myth, Ritual, and Reality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schlegel, Alice

1977 Male and Female in Hopi Thought and Action. *In* Sexual Stratification: A Cross Cultural View, edited by Alice Schlegel, pp. 245-269. New York: Columbia University Press.

Snyder, Sally

1964 Skagit Society and Its Existential Basis: An Ethnofolkloristic Reconstruction. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington.

Spindler, Louise, and George Spindler

1979 Changing Women in Men's Worlds. *In* Sex Roles and Changing Cultures. Occasional Papers in Anthropology No. 1, edited by A. McElroy and C. Matthiasson, pp. 35-48. Buffalo: Department of Anthropology, State University of New York at Buffalo.

Whitehead, Harriet

1981 The Bow and the Burden Strap: A New Look at Institutionalized Homosexuality in Native North America. *In* Sexual Meanings: The Cultural Construction of Gender and Society, edited by Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, pp. 80-115. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.