

# Woman Culture & Society

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## Preface

There is no question that the women's liberation movement has stimulated, in recent years, a good deal of interest in understanding and analyzing women's lives. At Stanford, in 1971, a collective of female graduate students in anthropology organized an undergraduate lecture course, "Women in Cross-Cultural Perspective." At more or less the same time anthropologists in other colleges and universities began to prepare similar courses, and to ask themselves what anthropologists might have to say about women and, conversely, how an interest in women might provide a new perspective in their field.

When Rosaldo (who taught that course, along with Jane Collier, Julia Howell, Kim Kramer, Janet Shepherd Fjellman, and Ellen Lewin) showed Lamphere a copy of the Stanford lectures, we both decided that the issues raised, the problems solved, and the questions that remained unasked (and so, unanswered) were of sufficient importance and interest to be shared. The difficulties of bringing an entirely new perspective to bear on anthropological materials had encouraged a good deal of creative thinking, suggestive questioning, and research. How, for example, in a field that had a long tradition of describing men's place in society, could we begin to characterize the interest of women's lives? And then, again, how were we to evaluate the great variation in female activities, roles, and powers that is found in different human groups? What were we to make of the popular claim that women are, biologically, men's inferiors? If we rejected that claim, how then could we begin to explain and understand the fact that women are treated, culturally and socially, as inferior, in virtually all societies in the world? Ultimately, of course, all of these questions revolve around a need to reexamine the ways in which we think about ourselves.

The impetus for this book lies in our conviction that the lack of interest in women in conventional anthropology constitutes a genuine

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