The Feminization of Anthropology: Moving Private Discourses into the Public Sphere

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In this essay I want to talk about some of the implications for female graduate students of the feminization of anthropology. Feminization can mean several different things, but here I refer simply to the massive increase in the number of women in our profession. When I started graduate school in 1966 at the University of Pennsylvania in the anthropology department, there were 26 students in my entering class. Only four of us were women. All four went on to complete Ph.D. degrees, while many of the men did not. Of those four, three of us became linguistic anthropologists—Elinor Ochs, Marjorie (Candy) Goodwin, and myself. There were no women on the tenure track faculty—none. Today more than half of the students in graduate programs are women, and many department faculties are made up of close to equal numbers of women and men.

Feminism and feminization are sometimes conflated, so let me be clear that I am focusing on the latter rather than the former. Feminism has played an important role in heightening...
awareness of discrimination against women, and in bringing more women into the field. However, over the last few decades, wider socioeconomic processes have contributed to the massive infusion of women into the bureaucratically organized money-for-work world. Some economists (e.g. Ehrenreich 1983) have argued that the United States has maintained productivity only because of that massive infusion. The academic discipline of anthropology has participated in this broad sweep of change, as has the academy as a whole. The widespread influence of the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1970s alone cannot account for this.

In anthropology, the feminism that came into the academy from the Women’s Liberation Movement has had a major impact on theory, method, and substance across all four sub-disciplines, recently documented in a 2007 series of articles in the Anthropology Newsletter under the sponsorship of the Association for Feminist Anthropologists (AFA). And since the mid-1970s the Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology (COSWA) has played an important role in documenting gendered graduation and employment patterns. During one period that committee even actively pressured departments with poor records of hiring women to change their ways, and it has sponsored many AAA Meetings sessions designed to help women in the field.

However, it is my sense that the day-to-day lived experience of women graduate students involves many practical issues of a fairly emotionally charged nature that are not fully captured by either feminist theory in anthropology or by the professionalizing rhetoric of COSWA, as influential and important as these discourses have been. I suggest that there is often a disjuncture (Meek 2007, Irvine 2007), to use a current anthropological
linguistic concept, between the ways of talking about women in our written and spoken formal professional discourses and how women discuss more informally and privately what they are thinking about and coping with as they make their way through graduate school and beyond graduate school into the world of work.

Following Eli Thorkelson’s urging to anthropologists to use some of our own concepts to elucidate the graduate student socialization experience, I will talk here (albeit a bit loosely) about three sets of “discourses” that circulate among women in anthropology. These discourses reach into public spheres, but are sustained largely by relatively private talk among women of all ages and stages of professional development in the profession. Here I bring them to bear on graduate student socialization in particular.

Like the term feminization, “discourse” has multiple meanings. Since the 1980s, linguistic anthropologists and linguists have used the term “discourse” to refer to actual speech. More specifically discourse refers to speech “above the level” of the sentence or utterance. It refers to the stringing together of sentences that are understood to be and expected to be related, interdependent and coherent in rule-governed ways, whether within the talk of a single speaker or between the turns at talk of different speakers. Linguistic anthropologists (e.g. Silverstein & Urban 1996) emphasize that interdependent utterances are organized into larger bounded units of speech, i.e. speech genres or forms of talk, such as story, prayer, and conversation, that, like sentences, are constrained in their sequential order and content.

The second meaning of “discourse” that has also been important in anthropology since the 1980s is Foucault’s concept, which refers to large-scale epochal discourses that are society-
wide and that can endure over centuries. Foucault (e.g. 1980) has described how such a discourse can spread through and permeate all institutional contexts so that its content and form comes to have a naturalized, taken-for-granted quality, so much so that we have difficulty even recognizing that the way in which we frame and experience our lives could be in any other way than it is.ii

Here I will discuss three interrelated discourses that occupy a middle range somewhere between a single form of talk and a society-wide replicative framing of experience, suggesting in passing the general need for greater attention to such middle-range phenomena in linguistic and cultural anthropology. Here certain kinds of stories, conversations and anecdotes circulate among women, reproducing the same ideas over and over again, and map certain meanings or ideas onto certain kinds of talk. The three discourse realms to be considered are: 1) discourses on relations between the sexes, or issues that arise for women as a consequence of working with men; 2) discourses on role models, or how women think and talk about who they have as advisors and mentors and why; and 3) discourses on the conflict between professional and personal life, which should be self-explanatory.

I suggest that these are discourses in the wider society that existed before feminism, were encompassed by feminism, and continue to go on within anthropology, even as a feminist rhetoric has waned and few graduate students seem interested in explicitly invoking feminism and its focus on the power-laden nature of the relationship between men and women in these discourses. At the same time, I will describe how these constant discourses have undergone transformation as a result of the feminization of the field. Nor would I limit my claims to anthropology as a discipline. These are discourses that cross disciplines, but my experiences are largely from within
anthropology, and so I anchor them in our discipline for the most part. To convey the nature of the transformations that have taken place, I will use a rhetoric of THEN and NOW, with THEN referring to what I can recapture of what it was like when I entered graduate school in the late sixties, and NOW referring to now. Basically I will argue that the transformations in these discourses show that women have more positive and better-supported experiences in graduate school now than they did four decades ago, yet many of the issues that concerned women then still concern them now.

The Discourse on Relations between the Sexes

A friend of mine who was in graduate school at the University of Chicago in Psychology at the same time as I was at Penn wrote a paper reinterpreting data from a famous scholar at Indiana University. Her paper was very well received by her teachers and with their encouragement she contacted the great man and drove down to Indiana University to meet with him to discuss it. She had some hope of intellectual exchange and the possibility of establishing an ongoing collegial relationship with him. But while she was with him, he ‘came on to’ her. What she remembers most vividly about this now long-ago event, which I originally heard about many years ago, was that he talked to her about his relationship with his mistress and what this woman did to enhance their sexual relationship. After she got out of the situation, she did not make contact with him again. Much to her disappointment, the possibility of working with him was cast aside. She in turn was cut off from what she had
heretofore seen as a promising relationship that would contribute to her intellectual development.

This brief account is an example of the kind of emotionally charged story that circulated among female graduate students when I was a graduate student, and that could even be retold repeatedly throughout a woman’s professional life. Being hit on in this way by faculty members was widely experienced and female graduate students talked about what they could have done to avoid it and how to avoid it in the future. Women also did vary in their reactions to such experiences. Not everyone did or could ‘flee the scene’ as the woman in my anecdote did. Some laughed off such experiences, while others found them distressing and offensive. In any case such anecdotes were the tip of an unarticulated iceberg of more ambiguous experiences that were part of the female graduate life several decades ago.

Here I suggest that THEN it was not easy for women to develop collegial ties with men, that women were not seen by male professors and male graduate students as potential colleagues, and this made it harder for the women to see themselves in this way. In retrospect, the atmosphere of graduate student life was sexually charged in a way that it is not today.

There are probably various reasons why this was the case. One reason that I was initially unaware of, and that I never took very seriously until much later in my career, was that even though women were admitted to graduate programs, many professors did not see them as worth investing time, money, and other resources in, because the women were perceived as not as likely to go on to have careers as the men were. Marriages and children would cause them to drop out of the profession. Recently I heard an account that focused on this issue about a woman my age who
was trained as an anthropologist at Cambridge University. On the occasion of her first meeting with her advisor, he somewhat angrily suggested to her that she had misrepresented herself as a single woman in her application for admission to the department, when in fact she was married. She had gotten married between the time of the application and the time of her arrival on campus. Had he known she was married, he told her, she would not have been accepted into the program.

This reminded me of an odd conversation I had had with a junior faculty member at Penn, during my second year of graduate study. He happily told me of a recent study that had found married female graduate students had a greater likelihood of finishing their graduate programs than unmarried female students. Since I was married at the time, I understood that he thought I would be pleased with this information, but naively, I was baffled as to its relevance. Some time later in my graduate career, another more senior faculty member told me that for many years he had been opposed to giving women fellowships because of his belief they would give up careers to devote themselves to family life, but he had now changed his mind. By this time I knew enough about faculty life to realize that faculty members sat around “behind closed doors,” debating who to let into the program and who to give money to. I understood that the belief women would give up careers for their family life in a way that men would not was figuring into such decisions. At the time I was in graduate school, then, this belief and its consequences were being debated and reconsidered. Since I was going through graduate school on an NSF Graduate Fellowship, I was oblivious to the possibility of such a debate, which apparently did not constrain decisions in the National Science Foundation in the way that it did in the department.
Now here I had thought the faculty members were not as interested in the female students as the male students because they saw us primarily as sex objects, but it turned out they were also seeing us as future mothers. In either case, they did not see us as prospective contributors to anthropology as a discipline to the degree that they did the men.

What is still clear to me is this: It was easier for male students than for female students to develop relationships involving intellectual exchange and friendship with both male students and male faculty members—the stuff of professional collegiality. I often saw the men walking together, chatting in the halls, and clustered around tables in the museum coffee shop. I also heard about research collaborations between male faculty and male students. Analogously the small numbers of women graduate students banded together, reaching across cohorts to do so. This was a major factor, in my personal experience, in the emergence of the ethnography of communication as a theoretical paradigm in linguistic anthropology. The women who majored in linguistic anthropology shared information about available courses and key sources as we sat together in the museum library or walked to school together or shared rides to Dell Hymes’ evening seminars in his home. Hymes’ concentration of female advisees did not go unnoticed by the other faculty members, one of whom, it was rumored, had nicknamed us Hymes’ Harem.

This gender segregation, which was of course greater for some than for others, seemed to me, in this pre-feminist era, to place the female students at a disadvantage in their professional development. I saw this gender semi-segregation as driven by two factors. First there was an easy male camaraderie, and a corresponding female camaraderie that built on our lifetimes of gender-segregated play and friendship groups of the sort
Deborah Tannen (1994) and others have written about extensively. Second, and relatedly, it seemed that professional relationships between the sexes always raised the possibility of the presence or development of a romantic and/or sexual relationship between the women and men who collaborated on academic projects or became friends. This is due in large part to the inherent ambiguity of the signs of romance, particularly in its early stages, e.g. “Is this a date?” I will not dwell on this phenomenon, but the ambiguity in the meaning of the signs of courtship is at least partly intentional so that parties may make tentative advances in such a way that they can later be plausibly denied as romantic moves, should there be no reciprocal uptake from the one being moved on.

The ethical view or the morality regarding romance between graduate students in the academic context was not very different forty years ago than it is today. For unattached males and females it didn’t matter if collegiality, friendship, or romance was what was sought. But if one party was attached, then he or she should neither come on to nor be hit on by others of the opposite sex. I did not want to be interpreted as coming on to my fellow male students. I was married and I often didn’t know if my male peers were involved romantically with anyone. So I was hesitant to reach out to male students the way I would to female students. Few of the men seemed interested in having collegial relationships with the female students. They sought out other men for this. So, it would have to have been me taking the initiative. Yet any gesture of interest seemed to be potentially interpretable as a come-on by the male students, as if I could have no other possible motive for wanting to talk to them. Some women were better at establishing collegial relationships with men than others. Certainly some were better at it than I was.
I recall thinking that if I wanted to be friends with a fellow married male student, then I needed to be friends with his wife as well, and indeed I was able to do that in some cases. But such friendship could not be assumed to be welcomed by a spouse. I experienced my sharpest rebuff from a spouse on an occasion when I returned to Penn for a few weeks while I was writing my dissertation. At the time, my husband and I had permanently separated, so I was single. At a party a fellow male graduate student suggested I go skiing with him and his wife (he was in fact trying to set me up with a male friend to whom he was close, who would have been included in the trip). He turned to his wife and said, “Hey, how about if Sue comes skiing with us next week?” And she replied coldly, “What would we do, have a ménage a trois?” This left me speechless with embarrassment, and I turned away, although perhaps someone else might have handled the situation differently.

In establishing relationships with male faculty, and recall there were only males, the same ‘rules’ applied as those for graduate students, but they were overlain by another set of understandings regarding the teacher-student relationship. Today, the basic rule, spelled out in faculty handbooks, is that a faculty member is not supposed to get into a romantic or sexual relationship with a student over whom he or she has authority. And there is also the idea, more informally, that an older, perceived-to-be-powerful faculty member will be taking advantage of a student if he or she comes on to him or her, in a way that is unfair to the student. Nor is the teacher supposed to accept the advances of a student. These ideas are difficult to unpack, and I am not going to try to do so here in detail, but the sense of it is that the greater ‘power’ of the faculty member means that the student cannot be viewed as a knowing agent in
the same way that the faculty member can be. This is a watered down version of ideas about adult-child relationships that lead to the creation of statutes such as those against statutory rape. I recall that when I was an undergraduate, an anthropologist for whom I was a research assistant articulated the view that while undergraduates were considered off limits, graduate students were considered fair game.

Many students have been in such relationships that have worked out well, or at least left no scars. Other students have been harmed by relationships with faculty members. As a graduate student, my impression was that most women, like my friend in my introductory anecdote, did not want to be given time and attention from male faculty because the men were interested in them sexually or romantically. They wanted the time and attention, but they wanted it to be because they were smart, had interesting ideas, and were seen as promising young scholars. To get time, attention, and sponsorship that could be seen as due to a teacher's sexual interest was seen as unfair, as violating the meritocracy framework of the academic bureaucracy of the sort Max Weber acquainted us with. To be seen as sexy was to be seen as inviting such unfair attention, as having/using an unfair advantage. It is interesting that those of us who felt this way did not see male graduate students who shared an interest in sports with male faculty members as similarly having an unfair advantage in developing collegial relationships with faculty. There was also a powerful sense that good looks and brains were antithetical—one could not have both, and one could not receive attention from a faculty member because of both. Thus it could harm one to be considered sexy, because with this would come the assumption that one was dumb, and this in turn could bias the ways in which teachers interpreted one’s work. And indeed,
this was the view of some female students at Penn when one very sexy student did in fact flunk her comprehensive written exams—i.e. the talk was that there was a bias against her in the reading of her exams because she was so attractive.

This mentality also entailed the assumption that it would be unfair for a woman to get a job “because” her already-a-professor husband threatened to leave his department and take a job elsewhere if she was not given one, or if he would only agree to take a job if she were given one too. Yet today the spousal hire, predominantly of women, but also of men, is common practice. Some spouses seem to view this almost as an entitlement. However, today it is perfectly conceivable that the spouse is as good a scholar as the person initially sought for a job, whereas in this earlier time, this was practically inconceivable.

**NOW**

The discourse on relations between the sexes is one that has changed over time, more as a result of the feminization of the field than through feminist political transformation, although that is a factor too. The discourse of ‘hitting on’ and ‘coming on to’ people and the anecdotes through which it circulates are less salient in anthropology departments than they were when women first began to enter the field in numbers.

There are so many women in graduate programs in anthropology departments now that women and men, faculty and students, are constantly in contact and there has been a desexualization of relationships among them compared to forty years ago. Both male and female faculty and students see female graduate students as actual and potential colleagues and are
interested in engaging them based on their ideas, their knowledge, and their potential contributions to the field.iv

Furthermore, in the major graduate programs (at least in linguistic anthropology) with which I have had recent experience, there are many more opportunities created by faculty and students alike for cross-gender collegial relationships and friendships to develop outside the classroom: sub-disciplinary potlucks and group projects in field methods courses at the University of Arizona, regular linguistic “labs” in which students evaluate each other’s work at the University of Michigan, research-oriented labs at UCLA, and the “workshop” system at the University of Chicago. Student-organized conferences also are sponsored in all of these places. These in turn foster still more informal gatherings organized by the students themselves: a good-bye party for a student going off to the field or a new job, a slide show of a student’s field experience, or a wedding. There have always been student parties, but I think they are more diverse nowadays in their nature and not only about drinking, dancing, and opportunities to find a significant other, all of which are of course important too.

This does not mean the cultural dimensions of relations between the sexes that were part of my own graduate experience are not still with us. It is also now the case that alternative sexual identities for both men and women are more salient in graduate programs, where students are ‘out’ as gay men and lesbian women to varying degrees, but usually more ‘out’ than faculty. This complicates people’s thinking about where sexual ambiguity may be located in relationships. Nor does it mean that there is not a significant place for same-gender as well as cross-gender professional relationships. I see that many young women in the field (still) have much more developed and enduring professional
relationships with women than with men, including their female professors.

As we will see in the next section, I discuss how the feminization of the field has created opportunities for female graduate students to have female professors as role models and mentors, opportunities that many young women avidly pursue, opportunities that simply were not available to women as recently as a few decades ago.

The Discourse on Role Models

Around the time I retired I ran into an archaeologist who had retired from my department about ten years before me. I told him, “You’re my role model for retirement.” I had in mind that he had stayed involved with his research and writing, and in his case, with other archaeologists in the department. “Me!” He exclaimed, “You don’t want me for a role model!” I think he was not happy with the amount of writing he had gotten done. Then not too long ago a colleague still in Women’s Studies at the University of Arizona (and still quite young) came up to me after I had given a talk and said, “Susan, you’re my role model for retirement. You just do whatever you like from the job and don’t have to do the rest.” I wanted to say, “Me! You don’t want me as a role model! I’m very confused about what I’m doing.” However, I refrained.

My main purpose in recounting these exchanges is to make the point that there is a discourse out there in our discipline, and presumably in other disciplines, about role models. This discourse is not typically quite so explicit in the use of the phrase
‘role model,’ and as in the discourse discussed in the preceding section about relations between the sexes, much is often left implicit. Furthermore, as in the anecdotes that begin this section, people have ideas about not just who is a positive role model, but also who is a negative role model. Finally, our thinking and talk about role models is not necessarily holistic—i.e. we don’t usually look at an individual and think, “I want to be just like him/her in every way.” Instead we pick and choose aspects of others’ professional and personal personae that we like and dislike as we think forward about our own lives. A few years ago I reminded a woman who had been a close friend in graduate school that she had once told me she wanted to be just like the wife of one of our professors. She emphatically denied that she could have possibly said this. I think now that when she denied it, she was thinking about professional role models, but that when she had said it, she was admiring the woman’s kitchen and her culinary skills.

I submit that this discourse, like the one I discussed in the previous section, has been continuous since the time I was in graduate school up to the present, but that like the discourse in the previous section it has undergone transformation. I know that such a discourse existed in the late sixties when I was in graduate school. Educational anthropologists, including myself, were advocating for the training of Indian teachers at that time so that Indian children could have teachers who were culturally more like themselves. Yet few Indians were going into teacher education, and it was thought that the reason for this was that they had no role models.

By the mid–nineteen seventies, the penetration into the academy of the grassroots Women’s Liberation Movement led to a call for more female professors in anthropology departments.
The salient issue was affirmative action, i.e. the equal treatment of male and female applicants for tenure-track jobs, with a preference for female applicants if male and female applicants were otherwise equally qualified for the position. The focus was not on the need for female graduate students to have female role models. However, it is very clear to me that such a need was explicitly being expressed by female graduate students by the 1980s because there was a movement in my own department among female graduate students in archaeology pressuring the faculty to hire a female archaeologist. This led to the hiring of Arizona’s first female archaeologist, Carol Kramer.

Many faculty members and graduate students think more about who graduate students will choose as members of their dissertation committees, particularly their chairs, than about any other faculty-student relationship. My own disposition is to think more broadly in terms of role models and mentors. For while faculty often think of their advisees as “their” students, as do many students, students also seem to me to be more broadly oriented toward a wider range of influences, both positive and negative, and the following discussion reflects that view.

THEN

When I myself was a graduate student at Penn, I was not thinking about who on the faculty could be a female role model for me or a female mentor to me because there were no female faculty members. Nor do I think I was willing to use the phrase ‘role model’ in either my head or my speech. I think instead that I thought about the standards that my male professors set in the work that they required of us—what we had to do and how we had to do it to meet their expectations and gain their approval,
some of which I agreed with, and some of which I did not agree with. I also had standards for how research was to be carried out that no one on the faculty seemed to model. I also thought about who I could work with and who I could not work with, and why.

Only in retrospect and much later did I look back on my time as a student and think about how other women in academia had influenced me. For female professorial models, I had to look back to my undergraduate experience at the University of California–Riverside. Had there been none, it might not have occurred to me to try to be a social scientist, but thankfully there were some. The physical anthropologist Jane Underwood was in the anthropology department at UC–Riverside, so I knew a woman could both be an anthropologist and be hired by a department. She was terrific as a model in demanding rigorous empirical methodology of her students in her physical anthropology course, and of me as my senior thesis advisor, and she nominated me for a graduate student fellowship. Two sociologists also loomed large. One, an adjunct, taught Sociology of Knowledge and was ‘cool’—she was brilliant, wore sandals that looked like the later Earth Shoes and was young and pretty. One could go to her with personal problems. The other was for me a negative role model—I don’t want to be like her intellectually, I clearly thought. I strongly disagreed with her use of quantitative approaches to social processes. But she was also older and she was not ‘cool.’ The emotional intensity of my negative feelings about her embarrasses me now, but I think the same kind of thing still goes on—I want to be like this one, and I really don’t want to be like that one in this or that way. The emotional intensity is embarrassing because it is evidence of the unfortunate tendency for women to be harder on each other than they are on men or than men are on each other.
More importantly, during graduate school, and since graduate school, my most important role models and mentors have been my female peers in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. I measured my progress against theirs. How on earth had one fellow graduate student managed to have children and still finish her dissertation by the same time I did? I also sought them out for advice. I remember sitting in a women’s restroom lounge in the Washington Hilton at an AAA meeting with one former fellow graduate student in the early eighties, questioning her at length about how she had methodologically gone about penetrating the language she studied as I prepared to try to do the same with Tongan. And I do think that today, while graduate students focus consciously on their professors as role models and mentors, they may underestimate the influence of their peers, both while in graduate school and in the long term.

NOW

Today, one of the very big changes that has resulted from the feminization of the discipline is that women entering graduate school have many female role models and female mentors available to them. I know this is important to them because they tell me so. They don’t hold back on their generous praise, and I know that it is a great source of satisfaction to many female professors to see young women develop and grow as anthropologists, and to hear them wax enthusiastic about their mentors. I know that just as they want to be like me in some respects, they also don’t want to be like me in other respects. For example, my students often told me that they appreciated my detailed comments on their papers. At the same time, they managed to let me know they thought I was too critical in those
same comments. I can well understand this dualism because I was the same way myself.

Fundamentally there is the sense that, “If she can do it, then it is possible that I can do it too,” whatever “it” is. During the years in which I was working closely with a lot of graduate students, I felt that many of the women were still somehow not getting some of the informal socialization that the men seemed to get. So to make it possible for them to realize their goals, I offered a lot of unsolicited advice (and still do), most but not all of which was accepted graciously. The women did not put themselves forward in the way the men do to find out about and apply for the range of honors, like “best graduate student paper,” or funding possibilities for field work, both in-house and national, that are out there, at least not in proportion to their numbers. Nor did they apply for as many jobs, more often seeing job descriptions as either not applicable to them, understanding the descriptions too narrowly, or as requiring more time than they felt they had to apply for lots of jobs. I have repeatedly urged the women to do more of all of these things. But the hardest thing, and the most important, is for the female graduate students to write more professional papers and submit them for publication. I think they still have overactive editors in their heads, are too critical of their own work, and hold themselves to impossibly high standards the way many women of my own generation have done. It is hard for them to put the work out there, to face criticism and rejection in public spheres. This is one area where the early socialization of boys in more overt forms of competition and harsher treatment generally, most obviously in sports, still gives the men an advantage, as unhealthy as this may be in some respects.
So female mentors stand for what is possible and they can provide some of the informal socialization that the women might not otherwise get. But I think there is more to female mentoring of female graduate students than this. There is the mentoring process itself—what is possible in that relationship with a woman that is less easy to come by with a man, if one is a woman. And here the issues developed in the preceding section on discourses on relations between the sexes come into play. For many women there are common areas of understanding and a level of comfort with each other that can be taken for granted. I have found that with many female students, it is both easy and relevant to move back and forth between talk that is of a professional nature and talk that is of a personal nature, just as I have found this with female colleagues. Such talk is still of an intergenerational nature, e.g. like that between aunt and niece, rather than like that between sisters or cousins, and less personal and emotionally charged than the mother-daughter relationship. It still has asymmetric qualities, rather than the symmetric character of peer relations. Some of my women students have been astonishingly open about areas of vulnerability in their professional lives, expressing a sense of academic inadequacy and seeking reassurance, whereas I felt as a graduate student that one must never let one’s guard down, never show weakness, or ignorance, or fear, even if it meant a total silencing of the self. My age mates tell me this was true of them as well.

While I enjoy the fluidity of the mix of the personal and professional in relationships with younger female students and colleagues, not all of my fellow female professors feel the same way. Some prefer to keep such relationships more professional. Some women professors resent the idea that both male and female students expect them, as women, to be more sympathetic
than their male professors, and to give the students more one-on-one time than the male professors give them. This is an issue that has been aired in the more public discussions of gender in academia, where the documentation of heavier service and teaching loads for women than for men has been used to explain why women publish less than men.

Finally, in female-to-female mentoring relationships one does not typically have to worry about inferences by others in the department, or by one’s partner, that there is a sexual-romantic relationship going on that would/could advantage or disadvantage the student. The door can be closed and laughter can peal out into the hall without someone saying, “What is that about?” If I say, “That’s a pretty skirt,” or touch an arm, there is no concern about ambiguity in the meaning of the sign.

The greater awareness today of the presence of lesbian students and lesbian faculty causes some people in anthropology departments to see this issue differently than I do, that is, to see sexual ambiguity in relationships between female academics because of the possibility of lesbianism in those relationships. I am not unmindful of this. In my very first year of teaching at the University of Arizona I chaired the senior thesis for a lesbian student who then went on to graduate school in anthropology. In graduate school she found being hit on by one of her female teachers pretty confusing, and after dropping out of graduate school cited this as a factor in her leaving. I also have seen how particularly older lesbian faculty simply avoided hugging other female faculty and graduate students in contexts where other female faculty did so, presumably to avoid attributions of sexual ambiguity in the gesture. But for me contact with lesbian women in academia has made their lack of sexual interest in straight women quite clear, and I find the same fluid mix of the personal
and the intellectual can still take place in such relationships, although it may take a little more time.

In sum, the feminization of the discipline has led to a sea change in the discourse on role models. Women can be more comfortable in actual faculty-student exchanges with other women, yes. But it is more important that female graduate students can look to female professors and see what is possible, and from among the possibilities, they can say, “I want to be like that,” but also “I don’t want to be like that.”

I have the sense, however, that there is one respect in which at least some contemporary female graduate students and young tenure-track-faculty don’t want to be like the women in my generation, or aren’t like us, whether they want to be or not, and that is in the balance they try to achieve in their lives between the personal and the professional, the topic to which discussion now turns.

**The Discourse on Conflict between Personal and Professional Lives**

“It really makes me angry that my biological clock and the tenure clock are exactly on the same schedule.” This was from one of my former students during a lunch we had at the recent AAA meetings. It is probably the strongest expression of a negative emotion I have ever heard from this mild mannered and gracious young scholar.

So far I have argued that the discourse on relations between the sexes that problematizes female-male collegial relationships has abated since I was in graduate school, although it is still present, with the abatement due to the greatly increased presence of
women in anthropology. And the discourse on female role models has undergone transformation, becoming more explicit and salient as more women have entered the field, so that young women now have many female professors as possible role models. In this section I will argue that a discourse on the conflict between women's personal and professional lives has become not only more salient, but has also shifted from being seen as primarily a personal matter belonging to individual women to a matter to be taken up by faculty in departments and by whole universities.

Although I have just characterized this discourse as about a conflict for women, I realize that the conflict exists for men too. However, I think the talk about this conflict is more frequently and widely produced by women than by men. I am sure there are various reasons for this, but the most obvious reason is that women are the ones who have the babies. The still-hegemonic discourse about child-rearing (and the reality) in American society is that the primary responsibility for raising children belongs to women. An example of this is the representation in the media these days of experiments in women bringing their babies into the workplace with them, involving interviews with mothers, co-workers, and bosses, usually about the positive effect on everyone's morale brought about by having a baby around. Frankly, I deplore the continuing prevalence of this expectation, associated as it is with a widespread blaming of mothers for everything that goes wrong with children, and the way it entails a lack of support for nurturing fathers, who continue to be condescended to. At the same time, I cannot say that I have ever been able to completely get outside of or transcend my sense that this discourse “belongs” to women.
Let me also note that talk about the relationship between the personal and the professional is dominated by a rhetoric of conflict or opposition, rather than, say, of mutual enhancement, complementarity or merging. I recall that when my son was young, Golda Meir, who by then was no longer head of the state of Israel, was asked how she had handled her job and her family life at the same time. She characterized the experience, aptly enough given the besieged mentality of Israelis, as “a war in my head,” adding that whenever she was at work, she felt she should be at home, and when she was at home she felt she should be at work. This stuck with me because it was how I felt. Yet I have known my son to claim he “traveled all over the world” (a bit of an exaggeration) with his anthropologist mother while growing up. So obviously there are complementarities.

But while the discourse on having babies is the most public and salient of the discourses on the conflict between the personal and the professional, there are other discourses that are represented in this conflict frame. The three discourses cast within a conflict frame that I have found to be part of the female graduate student experience are: 1) The conflict between the wife’s career and the husband’s career, or between the work lives of people in committed couple relationships; 2) The conflict between wife and husband, or domestic partners, over who will take care of domestic responsibilities, particularly cooking and cleaning; and 3) The conflict over who will take care of the children, mother or father, when they are not being cared for by others.

In each realm, for the woman, her personal commitment to the demands of others in her family takes time and energy away from her academic commitments. If her partner is meeting some of those demands, then she can give more to her academic
studies, but then the level of felt conflict goes up for the partner, who in turn can give less time to work or school. Another possibility is that the person who gives more to the personal realm still tries to sustain the same level of commitment to the professional realm and becomes exhausted and/or harried. A final possibility is that no one is giving enough to anything and everything suffers.

Here I am going to focus on the balancing act involved in meeting the school and work life desires of two individuals in a couple relationship, but I will return to the issue of babies at the end of this section. Anthropology graduate students typically are oriented forward to jobs in the academic world, which are few and far between. When a student goes on the job market, there are far more applicants than jobs. It is generally assumed that an academic will not stay in the community where his or her graduate education took place. If both partners want jobs, but can’t get them in the same city, who will accommodate whom? Or will the couple begin a “commuter relationship”? If a graduate student is married to someone whose work or training is of the sort that can lead to a job in a variety of community settings—a job such as teacher, lawyer, or doctor, then the issue of who will accommodate whom is mitigated, but it is still present.

THEN

My efforts to balance a personal and a professional life began before graduate school. My then-husband-to-be was my college sweetheart, who was a year older than me. His choice of graduate schools was made before we knew we would marry and was based on where he was given financial support. When it came to my turn to choose a graduate program, I was ultimately able to go
pretty much wherever I wanted to because I was awarded an NSF Graduate Fellowship. I chose to go to the University of Pennsylvania because it was in Philadelphia, near where he was going to school at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. By the end of my second year of graduate work, he was already on the job market, and got a job in Portland, Oregon. I negotiated with my department to finish my third year of course work through independent studies so that I could go with him, and, having passed my comprehensive exams at the end of my second year, I wrote my grant applications for fieldwork in isolation from my department.

Although I had wanted to do fieldwork in Guatemala, and Ben Reina on the faculty at Penn would have been happy to sponsor me, my distance from my department and from the support faculty provide in the negotiation of field sites, and my desire to keep my marriage going, led me to choose the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, only two hours’ drive from Portland, as my field site. My advisor, Dell Hymes, had worked there, I knew a great deal about the language and culture of the people he had worked with from reading his publications, and he readily provided me with contacts for establishing a presence there. At that time I did not realize the extent to which where one does one’s field work and the kind of work one does for the dissertation defines a student professionally, particularly when it comes time to get a job and keep a job. Nor did I realize how much time and energy one major project takes from start to finish. Had I realized these things, I might have taken more care in planning my dissertation fieldwork. However there was an assumption that one would be on and stay on a particular time table of work toward the degree if one wanted to maintain credibility with the faculty as a serious scholar, and I had already
jeopardized that credibility by leaving the department a year before I was supposed to and moving across the country.

The other women in the linguistic anthropology program who did fieldwork around the same time as I did—Elinor Ochs, Sheila Dauer, and Judy Irvine—all went into the field with their husbands, all of whom were still graduate students, and so had a flexibility that my own husband felt he lacked. The climate was not such that a junior faculty member in philosophy like my husband with one year of teaching to his credit could announce that he was leaving for a year to go into the field with his wife.

Despite our efforts to be with one another, particularly my efforts I thought, my husband and I were actually living apart a good deal of the time that all of this was going on, naively straining our relationship beyond what it could tolerate, so that by the time I came onto the job market, we were separated. This meant that I was free to take any job anywhere, and I moved through three other jobs before I happily ended up at the University of Arizona, where the department fit was a terrific one for me. By then I was involved with a man who was willing and able to move to where I was to be with me, which seemed then, and still seems, the greatest gift of love I could have been given.

Even as I was going through the process of grant writing and getting, of field work and dissertation write-up, I knew I was a prime candidate for never finishing my degree. I was too separated from my department, from my academic context, and it was very difficult for me to maintain the self-identity of an anthropologist in the making. In Portland I was seen as a faculty wife who was doing something or other to keep herself busy. I spent a lot of time watching soap operas, trying to make myself work, and reproaching myself for not working.
Nor did the fact that the other women I knew who went into the field with their husband necessarily alter the pattern that one partner's career took priority over the other's. What's more, literally none of the women I knew well who were married when they started graduate school stayed married to the men they started with. Some remained unmarried after their divorces for a very long time, or never remarried, which in those days simply precluded the possibility of having children.

Stepping back a bit, I should also point out that in every couple relationship, there are accommodations that both partners make to combine a personal and a professional relationship. My husband had done quite a bit of accommodating, despite my belief that I did much more. In college he grilled me for exams. He typed many of my papers. And he lived with me in Philadelphia until his department threatened to withdraw his fellowship if he didn't move back to Baltimore. However, when I was a graduate student it was far more common for the woman to do the accommodating than for the man to do it. Three features of my situation were common in that time that exacerbated this pattern: Women often married men who were older than they were. Women took longer to finish their degrees than men, partly because of having children, carrying a heavier domestic load, and having more demanded of them by their teachers and by themselves. And frankly, it was common for the man and not the woman to be mythologized as a “rising star” by male faculty and male graduate students, often in gossip that actively made comparisons between the man and the woman in the couple, comparisons that even found their way into letters of recommendation for jobs.
NOW

A key question is how much all this has changed. There is no question in my mind that there has been a significant shift in how partners conceptualize and actualize this joint negotiation of personal and professional lives. I know of many women whose partners have made professional sacrifices to accommodate their anthropological careers. However, while this is a difficult thing to measure or quantify, I believe that women are still doing more of the accommodating, usually quite willingly. And I still more often see the patterns I have mentioned affecting their graduate school experiences: marrying older men who are ready to apply for jobs before the women; the men having or getting jobs before the women, even if the women do go on the job market at the same time; and the women following the men to where they get the jobs, and then accommodating their careers to that situation.

We are all familiar with situations in which a person who is offered a job will not take it unless his or her partner is also given a job—i.e. the spousal hire. But not too many junior faculty members are in a position to have the leverage to have such demands realized. Most spousal hires take place in situations where the faculty member demanding a spousal hire either has a job offer elsewhere and will take it if his or her spouse is not hired, or has a job and won’t take the current new offer without the spouse being hired. And looking closely, it is usually men who are negotiating for their wives, and very often men who either have or will bring large grants with them or take large grants away with them if the spouse is not hired.

In the Anthropology Department at University of Arizona from which I recently retired, there were five couples on the tenure-track faculty at the time I left. In four of these cases, the
man had negotiated for his wife to be given a job. In one of those cases, the couple shared a job, so they were both half-time. In the other three cases the women were given only half-time positions, which meant it could take them as long as 12 years to become tenured! No one I know in academia would claim that a half-time job is really half-time—it is always more than that. These circumstances help explain why there are so many junior women and so few senior women, and why so many adjunct faculty are women.

Now at least some of the women in such part time positions are perfectly content with them, and this brings me to a final point that will ultimately get back around to the issue of having babies. In retrospect, I think the women I went to graduate school with were fierce about wanting professional careers as linguistic anthropologists, and we may have reinforced that fierceness in each other. We may also have had to be fierce to survive the academic process at all in a way that is less true now. The difficulties we encountered were part of what turned us into feminists to one degree or another when the Women’s Liberation Movement came along. Those difficulties are part of what makes us protective of our female graduate students and female junior faculty, and part of what dismays us when a very promising young woman does not realize what we thought were her dreams of becoming an anthropologist. But I find that what I wanted for myself and for them is very often not what they want for themselves. I think that many young women not only do not want to call themselves feminists, even if they participate in the discourses I am trying to document here, but they also do not value the professional life relative to the personal life with the same weighting as I did and as I think my peers did. I believe that some of them look at my generation and they feel that we have
not had what they want in their lives in the way of family life, husbands and children. They don’t have to be on the perfect professional track. If one thing does not work out for them professionally, then something else will. This actually bespeaks of a confidence they have that I did not have—that there will be something there for them professionally even if they do not follow a canonical academic track by, say, having babies along the way, taking soft-money research jobs instead of teaching jobs, even giving up tenured positions to move closer to family or to a more congenial community where they know, as I did not know, that something will work out for them. And the fact that they know they can do this is because they have seen it happen for the now many women before them who did precisely this.

They can choose among different ways of being a professional anthropologist partly because of the many women (and men) ahead of them who will help them in any way they can due to the overall change in the academic climate for women. They also know they can make such choices because of the many institutional changes that give women more flexibility in meeting the demands of their personal lives: junior leaves, a wider range of in-house research funding opportunities and post-doctoral fellowships, maternity leaves, the adjunct faculty positions so deplored by many, half-time positions, major long-term soft-money projects, and even free child care for graduate students.

When I was a graduate student, I would not have dreamed of having a baby. There was no way that was going to happen. I had seen my mother struggle to get through a graduate program and ultimately give it up after her third child, and I was convinced that the same thing would happen to me if I had a baby before I finished my degree. The female graduate student population is older now than it was a few decades ago. And we know now in a
way that we did not know then how early women’s fertility declines. This means the pressure to beat the biological clock is greater than it used to be. But now female graduate students in anthropology can go ahead and have those babies, even before they do fieldwork, and believe, certainly with greater justification than either my mother or I had, that however meandering a path they take, they can still combine a professional life with a personal life in the way that they, not I, want for themselves. However, it is also not that easy to take a baby into overseas fieldwork situations, so those with babies are more likely to do fieldwork in the United States, and even in their local university communities, following the pattern I followed. And like me, they may not realize how much their fieldwork choices will define them when they come onto the job market.

But as I have tried to suggest here, the talk about babies is just the most publicly permissible discourse on the conflict between personal and professional lives, while the other discourses, only one of which I have developed, i.e. that of the conflict generated by the separate careers of partners in long term relationships, continue to circulate in private among women.

Finally, while I have suggested that women today have more options and more flexibility built into their career tracks over time, not all of these women see it this way. Many couples live apart for years to maintain dual-career families. Many women still do not marry because they move from place to place to stay in academia and/or can’t find partners who are even comfortable being with a woman with a Ph.D., let alone willing to make changes to accommodate her career.
Summary and Discussion

In this essay I have documented some of the discourses of a relatively private nature that are part of women’s graduate student socialization in anthropology. The more public discourses on feminist theory and its impact on the discipline, fostered by the Association of Feminist Anthropologists, and on the professional status of women, fostered by the Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology, are important to us, and feed into and are fed by these more informal discourses. But I submit that the kinds of issues raised here are more emotionally compelling and more salient in the heads of more women than the public discourses.

I will summarize the claims I am making about each of the three discourses I have discussed here and comment on them.

The discourse on relations between the sexes. When I came into the field of anthropology we few female graduate students told each other stories about being hit on by male faculty in ways that were unwelcome, and discussed how to avoid such unwelcome advances. We wanted more collegial relationships with both faculty and fellow graduate students than we had, and we felt we were too often or too much perceived as sex objects by the men. This situation drew us closer to each other and our fellow female graduate students became important role models and colleagues to us. Now, with so many more women in the field, and decades of public discourses about sexual harassment in universities, there has been a desexualization of collegial relationships and greater cross-gender collegiality. A discourse that problematizes cross-gender collegiality has abated. But some young women feel the graduate school climate is still pretty sexualized, and it is still...
easier for women to have collegial relationships with women than with men.

The discourse on role models. When I was in graduate school in anthropology, there were few female faculty members, so female faculty role models were few and far between. And as I have already noted, for many of us, our fellow female graduate students were our most important female role models. We talked and thought about who we did and did not want to be like, and who we did and did not want to work with. However, the gender of the choices of faculty mentors could not really be salient. What few female mentors we had were experienced and talked about, at least by me, with a certain emotional intensity that did not accompany analogous discourses about male mentors. Now there are so many female faculty that the gender of a student’s mentors can be and is thought about and talked about by female graduate students. We mentors talk about it too, and some of us feel that female (and male) students have visions and expectations of female faculty that are different from those they have for male faculty. This difference in expectations of female faculty includes the expectation that one can be more intimate or personal with female faculty. This is alright with me and I enjoy it, but the gender differentiation in students’ expectations of mentors is one that not all of us embrace.

The discourse on conflict between personal and professional lives. When I was in graduate school, women talked about professional choices they were making in a way that revealed conflicts between the demands of their personal family lives and the professional demands of graduate school and job-getting. This discourse often centered on the couple relationship and showed how women were giving more priority to maintaining relationships and less to developing a career than men were,
although this was treated rather matter-of-factly and not with indignation or anger at the time. Now, if anything, this discourse has intensified, and there is more explicit acknowledgment that a conflict exists and that choices that sacrifice one part of life for another, or one partner for the other, are being made. I have suggested that women are still accommodating their partners’ careers more than men are, but men are making more accommodations than they used to. The greater salience of this discourse is due to a variety of factors. Notably, both women and men in graduate school are older now than in earlier decades and women are more aware of how early in life their fertility declines. As the producers of babies, this conflict for these older women is intensified. They feel disadvantaged compared to men in the pressures they face trying to have both careers and families. And some women are angry about it. However, I think that the couple relationship is still very protected so that loyalty to the partner precludes public discussion of problems in the relationship, and women talk only to their closest women friends, if to anyone, about the actual specifics of conflicts with partners they are committed to.

In the beginning of this paper I suggested that anthropological concepts of discourse could be brought to bear in a characterization of how female graduate students experience aspects of their graduate student socialization related to the feminization of the discipline. I described the discourses represented here as occupying a middle range of circulation and experience between the Foucauldian taken-for-granted discourse that pervade whole societies over long periods of time, and actual instances of sequences of utterances organized into forms of talk in interaction.
The descriptions of the three discourses I have offered suggest some general properties of middle-range discourses that have practical implications for how anthropologists can transform such discourses and the experiences about which they are really meta-discourses. First, at this middle range of circulation, there is a very loose relationship between the content and the form of the discourses—particular ideas or content are not systematically tied in any obvious way to particular social domains, social contexts, and genres. While my aim has been to bring relatively “private” discourses into a “public sphere,” there is ample evidence in my discussion of already existing significant interconnectedness between various kinds of relevant domains and the manifestations of the discourses in them. The fluidity is conspicuous.

Second, the three discourses I discuss are obviously interconnected, as are the sub-topics within them, and while I have made some of the connections explicit, some are not so explicit. For example, as I think about these representations and the comments I have received about them, I can see that a thread which runs through them is talk about intimacy. For women the ongoing feminization of the discipline entails a continuous reconceptualization and reconfiguration or reallocation of intimacy. As both female graduate students and female professors we don’t want male faculty imposing sexual intimacy on female graduate students. We talk about collegiality and want more collegial closeness, but disagree among ourselves about both who that should be with and whether we are getting it. We think we should be able to have closeness in family life and closeness in collegial involvements, but we find ourselves pulled or torn between what we conceptualize as separate spheres.
Other interconnectednesses are even less obvious. For example, in the discussion of relations between the sexes, I pointed out that while female students were talking to each other about incidents of faculty hitting on students when I was in graduate school, the faculty were talking to each other in meetings about not giving fellowships to prospective (not even actual) mothers. Yet both these kinds of instances of interaction were evidence that faculty members were not seeing female graduate students as actual or prospective colleagues and contributors to our discipline.

Third, each of the three discourses has some manifestations that are in greater circulation than others, both in the sense of being more frequently reproduced and in the sense of being spread across a wider range of social domains and genres. Each discourse has some manifestations that are more precisely and exactly replicated than others, and some that are more explicit and sharpened than others. At the same time how this variation works has changed over time. For example anecdotes of being hit on were frequent when I was in graduate school, but not spread across a wide range of domains and genres. Yet through time such anecdotes moved into the public sphere and became transformed into discourses about sexual harassment, a different concept. Discourses about sexual harassment in turn got shut down every time there was the settlement of a legal case in a university with conditions requiring the case no longer be talked about. Now, in departments, anecdotes about students being hit on have abated (and/or become more private and limited in circulation) and so have the discourses about sexual harassment. Talk about biological clocks ticking was not salient when I was in graduate school. Today it is a very big topic, but cannot be said to
take the genre form of anecdotes about past events. Rather it is embedded in conversations about the future.

Such phenomena can be understood instrumentally. Any anthropologist in any institutional position can use individual agency to relate, replicate, spread, and transform any discourse, or refuse to do so. This is how social change takes place from a linguistic anthropological perspective. Thinking and talking about how discourses are manifested and understanding how these middle-range processes work can enable people in the discipline to more deliberately move social changes in the directions they desire.

In conclusion, more than one reader of an earlier draft of this paper has suggested to me that the very feminization of our discipline may have contributed to a lessening of discourses about gender inequities in graduate student socialization in anthropology. It is as if, since there are more women graduate students than men now in anthropology, there is no longer any reason to speak of inequities. There is no question in my mind that female graduate students are better supported in every way in their efforts to become anthropologists than they were a few decades ago. However, the continued relevance of the discourses treated here, even as they have been transformed by the feminization of the discipline, is a testament to the continuing dilemmas posed by graduate school for the women in the field.

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Endnotes

i. Eli expressly urged me to write about gender for a collection on graduate student socialization in anthropology because none of the student writers were doing so, and he saw this as an important dimension of academic life. I initially declined, largely because in a sense it felt like there was too much to say. I changed my mind because I have criticized histories of the women’s movement for over-generalizing, and have felt such histories should capture the multiplicity of women’s experiences far more than they have. This is one reason this essay is so “I”-filled.

ii. Gee (e.g. 1999) makes a distinction between “Big D Discourse” and “little d discourse” that may sound like the distinction I am making here, and probably was influenced by both the concepts I’ve just described. However, his little d discourse refers simply to speech. His more elaborated concept of Big D Discourse is actually more like what I refer to as middle-range discourses in the discussion to follow. His analytical distinction does not include a Foucauldian kind of idea of discourse.

iii. In a 2/7/2008 Dear Abby column titled “Is ‘playful gesture’ appropriate?” Abby was asked if it was appropriate for a man aged 56 to slap his 35 year old daughter on the butt. Abby answered: “You have confused someone getting a ‘love pat’ with someone being hit on” (Arizona Daily Star, Accent Section, p. E5). This is an example of the
kind of ambiguity I am talking about here. This example is pertinent because one chair of a department I was in as a faculty member did have a reputation for swatting female graduate students on the butt.

iv. One colleague has suggested to me that this de-sexualization has left female graduate students relatively unprepared to handle situations where they are hit on by male faculty.

v. Women are probably more active than the men in putting out in-house publications, organizing sessions for professional meetings and local conferences, and in pulling together the kinds of informal events like going-away parties and dinners that I suggested in the preceding section of this paper are more common today than they were when I was in graduate school. Now, if I am right, what is THAT about? Is it easier for them to put themselves forward as part of a group than as individuals? Are such activities more like dinner and holiday parties or what?

vi. Readers of an earlier draft of this paper raised a host of issues around mentoring that I have not addressed. These issues are tied more explicitly to the issue of advisor selection than to mentoring in general. They include the well-known gendering of choices of subfield, which has only been documented statistically and not qualitatively to my knowledge, the less well-known gendering of choices of cultural area (where can a woman go alone and be safe?), the possible gendering in choices of theoretical paradigm, and the gendering of choices of advisors in interaction with all of the above.

vii. I find it ironic that many state institutions now provide parental leave, rather than maternal leave, given the continued dominance of expectations that the women will deal with child care, as welcome as the concept of parental leave is. More than one woman has expressed the view too that men typically see and use these leaves to do research and writing, while women use them for actual infant care.
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