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What is This?

GENDER AS A SOCIAL STRUCTURE
Theory Wrestling with Activism

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In this article, the author argues that we need to conceptualize gender as a social structure, and by doing so, we can better analyze the ways in which gender is embedded in the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society. To conceptualize gender as a structure situates gender at the same level of general social significance as the economy and the polity. The author also argues that while concern with intersectionality must continue to be paramount, different structures of inequality have different constructions and perhaps different influential causal mechanisms at any given historical moment. We need to follow a both/and strategy to understand gender structure, race structure, and other structures of inequality as they currently operate while also systematically paying attention to how these axes of domination intersect. Finally, the author suggests we pay more attention to doing research and writing theory with explicit attention to how our work can indeed help transform as well as inform society.

Keywords: *feminist theory; gender theory; social structure; social change*

Gender has become a growth industry in the academy. In the years between my own college education and today, we have moved from not enough having been published in 1972 to justify my writing a literature review for an undergraduate course paper to more sociologists' studying and teaching about gender than any other single substantive area in American society. In 1998, I published *Gender Vertigo: American Families in Transition* (Risman 1998), which offered both a historical narrative about how the field of gender had developed and an integrative

theoretical explanation for the tenacity of gender stratification in families. In this article, I briefly summarize my earlier argument that gender should be conceptualized as a social structure (Risman 1998) and extend it with an attempt to classify the mechanisms that help produce gendered outcomes within each dimension of the social structure. I then provide evidence from my own and others' research to support the usefulness of this theoretical schema. Finally, using gender structure as a starting point, I engage in conversation with ideas currently emerging about intersectionality and wrestle with how we might use theory in the service of social change.

GENDER AS SOCIAL STRUCTURE

With this theory of *gender as a social structure*, I offer a conceptual framework, a scheme to organize the confusing, almost limitless, ways in which gender has come to be defined in contemporary social science. Four distinct social scientific theoretical traditions have developed to explain gender. The first tradition focuses on how individual sex differences originate, whether biological (Udry 2000) or social in origin (Bem 1993). The second tradition, perhaps portrayed best in Epstein's (1988) *Deceptive Distinctions*, emerged as a reaction to the first and focuses on how the social structure (as opposed to biology or individual learning) creates gendered behavior. The third tradition, also a reaction to the individualist thinking of the first, emphasizes social interaction and accountability to others' expectations, with a focus on how "doing gender" creates and reproduces inequality (West and Zimmerman 1987). The sex-differences literature, the doing gender interactional analyses, and the structural perspectives have been portrayed as incompatible in my own early writings as well as in that of others (Fuchs Epstein 1988; Kanter 1977; Ferree 1990; Risman 1987; Risman and Schwartz 1989). England and Browne (1992) argued persuasively that this incompatibility is an illusion: All structural theories must make assumptions about individuals, and individualist theories must make presumptions about external social control. While we do gender in every social interaction, it seems naive to ignore the gendered selves and cognitive schemas that children develop as they become cultural natives in a patriarchal world (Bem 1993). The more recent integrative approaches (Connell 2002; Lorber 1994; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; Risman 1998) treat gender as a socially constructed stratification system. This article fits squarely in the current integrative tradition.

Lorber (1994) argued that gender is an institution that is embedded in all the social processes of everyday life and social organizations. She further argued that gender difference is primarily a means to justify sexual stratification. Gender is so endemic because unless we see difference, we cannot justify inequality. Lorber provided much cross-cultural, literary, and scientific evidence to show that gender difference is socially constructed and yet is universally used to justify stratification. She wrote that "the continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to

construct women as a group to be subordinate to men as a group" (p. 33). I share this presumption that the creation of difference is the very foundation on which inequality rests.

Martin (forthcoming) extended Lorber's (1994) use of the term "institution" in her argument that gender should be conceptualized as such. She identified the criteria for a social institution as follows: (1) Characteristic of groups; (2) persists over time and space; (3) includes distinct social practices; (4) constrains and facilitates behavior/action; (5) includes expectations, rule/norms; (6) is constituted and reconstituted by embodied agents; (7) is internalized as identities and selves; (8) includes a legitimating ideology; (9) is contradictory, rife with conflict; (10) changes continuously; (11) is organized by and permeated with power; and (12) is mutually constituted at different levels of analysis. I build on this notion of gender as an institution but find the institutional language distracting. The word "institution" is too commonly used to refer to particular aspects of society, for example, the family as an institution or corporations as institutions. My notion of gender structure meets the criteria offered by Martin (forthcoming) as well. While the language we use may differ, our goals are complementary, as we seek to situate gender as embedded not only in individuals but throughout social life (Patricia Martin, personal communication).

I prefer to define gender as a social structure because this brings gender to the same analytic plane as politics and economics, where the focus has long been on political and economic structures. While the language of structure suits my purposes, it is not ideal because despite ubiquitous usage in sociological discourse, no definition of the term "structure" is widely shared. Smelser (1988) suggested that all structuralists share the presumption that social structures exist outside individual desires or motives and that social structures at least partially explain human action. Beyond that, consensus dissipates. Blau (1977) focused solely on the constraint collective life imposes on the individual. In their influential work, Blau and his colleagues (e.g., Blau 1977; Rytina et al. 1988) argued that the concept of structure is trivialized if it is located inside an individual's head in the form of internalized norms and values. Blau focused solely on the constraint collective life imposes on the individual; structure must be conceptualized, in his view, as a force opposing individual motivation. Structural concepts must be observable, external to the individual, and independent of individual motivation. This definition of "structure" imposes a clear dualism between structure and action, with structure as constraint and action as choice.

Constraint is, of course, an important function of structure, but to focus only on structure as constraint minimizes its importance. Not only are women and men coerced into differential social roles; they often choose their gendered paths. A social structural analysis must help us understand how and why actors choose one alternative over another. A structural theory of action (e.g., Burt 1982) suggests that actors compare themselves and their options to those in structurally similar positions. From this viewpoint, actors are purposive, rationally seeking to maximize their self-perceived well-being under social-structural constraints. As Burt (1982)

suggested, one can assume that actors choose the best alternatives without presuming they have either enough information to do it well or the options available to make choices that effectively serve their own interests. For example, married women may choose to do considerably more than their equitable share of child care rather than have their children do without whatever "good enough" parenting means to them if they see no likely alternative that the children's father will pick up the slack.

While actions are a function of interests, the ability to choose is patterned by the social structure. Burt (1982) suggested that norms develop when actors occupy similar network positions in the social structure and evaluate their own options vis-à-vis the alternatives of similarly situated others. From such comparisons, both norms and feelings of relative deprivation or advantage evolve. The social structure as the context of daily life creates action indirectly by shaping actors' perceptions of their interests and directly by constraining choice. Notice the phrase "similarly situated others" above. As long as women and men see themselves as different kinds of people, then women will be unlikely to compare their life options to those of men. Therein lies the power of gender. In a world where sexual anatomy is used to dichotomize human beings into types, the differentiation itself diffuses both claims to and expectations for gender equality. The social structure is not experienced as oppressive if men and women do not see themselves as similarly situated.

While structural perspectives have been applied to gender in the past (Epstein 1988; Kanter 1977), there has been a fundamental flaw in these applications. Generic structural theories applied to gender presume that if women and men were to experience identical structural conditions and role expectations, empirically observable gender differences would disappear. But this ignores not only internalized gender at the individual level (which indeed purely structural theorists deny exists) but the cultural interactional expectations that remain attached to women and men because of their gender category. A structural perspective on gender is accurate only if we realize that gender itself is a structure deeply embedded in society.

Giddens's (1984) structuration theory adds considerably more depth to this analysis of gender as a social structure with his emphasis on the recursive relationship between social structure and individuals. That is, social structures shape individuals, but simultaneously, individuals shape the social structure. Giddens embraced the transformative power of human action. He insisted that any structural theory must be concerned with reflexivity and actors' interpretations of their own lives. Social structures not only act on people; people act on social structures. Indeed, social structures are created not by mysterious forces but by human action. When people act on structure, they do so for their own reasons. We must, therefore, be concerned with why actors choose their acts. Giddens insisted that concern with meaning must go beyond the verbal justification easily available from actors because so much of social life is routine and so taken for granted that actors will not articulate, or even consider, why they act.

This nonreflexive habituated action is what I refer to as the cultural component of the social structure: The taken for granted or cognitive image rules that belong to the situational context (not only or necessarily to the actor's personality). The cultural component of the social structure includes the interactional expectations that each of us meet in every social encounter. My aims are to bring women and men back into a structural theory where gender is the structure under analysis and to identify when behavior is habit (an enactment of taken for granted gendered cultural norms) and when we do gender consciously, with intent, rebellion, or even with irony. When are we doing gender and re-creating inequality without intent? And what happens to interactional dynamics and male-dominated institutions when we rebel? Can we refuse to do gender or is rebellion simply doing gender differently, forging alternative masculinities and femininities?

Connell (1987) applied Giddens's (1984) concern with social structure as both constraint and created by action in his treatise on gender and power (see particularly chapter 5). In his analysis, structure constrains action, yet "since human action involves free invention . . . and is reflexive, practice can be turned against what constrains it; so structure can deliberately be the object of practice" (Connell 1987, 95). Action may turn against structure but can never escape it. We must pay attention both to how structure shapes individual choice and social interaction and to how human agency creates, sustains, and modifies current structure. Action itself may change the immediate or future context.

A theory of gender as a social structure must integrate this notion of causality as recursive with attention to gender consequences at multiple levels of analysis. Gender is deeply embedded as a basis for stratification not just in our personalities, our cultural rules, or institutions but in all these, and in complicated ways. The gender structure differentiates opportunities and constraints based on sex category and thus has consequences on three dimensions: (1) At the individual level, for the development of gendered selves; (2) during interaction as men and women face different cultural expectations even when they fill the identical structural positions; and (3) in institutional domains where explicit regulations regarding resource distribution and material goods are gender specific.

Advantages to Gender Structure Theory

This schema advances our understanding of gender in several ways. First, this theoretical model imposes some order on the encyclopedic research findings that have developed to explain gender inequality. Thinking of each research question as one piece of a jigsaw puzzle, being able to identify how one set of findings coordinates with others even when the dependent variables or contexts of interest are distinct, furthers our ability to build a cumulative science. Gender as a social structure is enormously complex. Full attention to the web of interconnection between gendered selves, the cultural expectations that help explain interactional patterns, and institutional regulations allows each research tradition to explore the growth of their own trees while remaining cognizant of the forest.

A second contribution of this approach is that it leaves behind the modernist warfare version of science, wherein theories are pitted against one another, with a winner and a loser in every contest. In the past, much energy (including my early work; Risman 1987) was devoted to testing which theory best explained gender inequality and by implication to discounting every alternative possibility.[1] While this is perhaps an effective technique for building academic careers, as a model for explaining complex social phenomena, it leaves much to be desired. Theory building that depends on theory slaying presumes parsimony is always desirable, as if this complicated world of ours were best described with simplistic monocausal explanations. While parsimony and theory testing were the model for the twentieth-century science, a more postmodern science should attempt to find complicated and integrative theories (Collins 1998). The conceptualization of gender as a social structure is my contribution to complicating, but hopefully enriching, social theory about gender.

A third benefit to this multidimensional structural model is that it allows us to seriously investigate the direction and strength of causal relationships between gendered phenomena on each dimension. We can try to identify the site where change occurs and at which level of analysis the ability of agentic women and men seem able, at this historical moment, to effectively reject habitualized gender routines. For example, we can empirically investigate the relationship between gendered selves and doing gender without accepting simplistic unidirectional arguments for inequality presumed to be either about identities or cultural ideology. It is quite possible, indeed likely, that socialized femininity does help explain why we do gender, but doing gender to meet others' expectations, surely, over time, helps construct our gendered selves. Furthermore, gendered institutions depend on our willingness to do gender, and when we rebel, we can sometimes change the institutions themselves. I have used the language of dimensions interchangeably with the language of levels because when we think of gender as a social structure, we must move away from privileging any particular dimension as higher than another. How social change occurs is an empirical question, not an a priori theoretical assumption. It may be that individuals struggling to change their own identities (as in consciousness-raising groups of the early second-wave women's movement) eventually bring their new selves to social interaction and create new cultural expectations. For example, as women come to see themselves (or are socialized to see themselves) as sexual actors, the expectations that men must work to provide orgasms for their female partners becomes part of the cultural norm. But this is surely not the only way social change can happen. When social movement activists name as inequality what has heretofore been considered natural (e.g., women's segregation into low-paying jobs), they can create organizational changes such as career ladders between women's quasi-administrative jobs and actual management, opening up opportunities that otherwise would have remained closed, thus creating change on the institutional dimension. Girls raised in the next generation, who know opportunities exist in these workplaces, may have an altered sense of

possibilities and therefore of themselves. We need, however, to also study change and equality when it occurs rather than only documenting inequality.

Perhaps the most important feature of this conceptual schema is its dynamism. No one dimension determines the other. Change is fluid and reverberates throughout the structure dynamically. Changes in individual identities and moral accountability may change interactional expectations, but the opposite is possible as well. Change cultural expectations, and individual identities are shaped differently. Institutional changes must result from individuals or group action, yet such change is difficult, as institutions exist across time and space. Once institutional changes occur, they reverberate at the level of cultural expectations and perhaps even on identities. And the cycle of change continues. No mechanistic predictions are possible because human beings sometimes reject the structure itself and, by doing so, change it. Much time and energy can be wasted trying to validate which dimension is more central to inequality or social change. Instead, the feminist project is better served by finding empirical answers to particular questions and by identifying how particular processes explain outcomes in need of change. If our goal is to do scholarship that contributes to transforming society, the identification of the processes that explain particular outcomes is the first step in effectively changing those processes and subsequently the outcomes themselves.

Social Processes Located by Dimension in the Gender Structure

When we conceptualize gender as a social structure, we can begin to identify under what conditions and how gender inequality is being produced within each dimension. The "how" is important because without knowing the mechanisms, we cannot intervene. If indeed gender inequality in the division of household labor at this historical moment were primarily explained (and I do not suggest that it is) by gendered selves, then we would do well to consider the most effective socialization mechanisms to create fewer gender-schematic children and resocialization for adults. If, however, the gendered division of household labor is primarily constrained today by cultural expectations and moral accountability, it is those cultural images we must work to alter. But then again, if the reason many men do not equitably do their share of family labor is that men's jobs are organized so they cannot succeed at work and do their share at home, it is the contemporary American workplace that must change (Williams 2000). We may never find a universal theoretical explanation for the gendered division of household labor because universal social laws may be an illusion of twentieth-century empiricism. But in any given moment for any particular setting, the causal processes should be identifiable empirically. Gender complexity goes beyond historical specificity, as the particular causal processes that constrain men and women to do gender may be strong in one institutional setting (e.g., at home) and weaker in another (e.g., at work).

The forces that create gender traditionalism for men and women may vary across space as well as time. Conceptualizing gender as a social structure contrib-

utes to a more postmodern, contextually specific social science. We can use this schema to begin to organize thinking about the causal processes that are most likely to be effective on each dimension. When we are concerned with the means by which individuals come to have a preference to do gender, we should focus on how identities are constructed through early childhood development, explicit socialization, modeling, and adult experiences, paying close attention to the internalization of social mores. To the extent that women and men choose to do gender-typical behavior cross-situationally and over time, we must focus on such individual explanations. Indeed, much attention has already been given to gender socialization and the individualist presumptions for gender. The earliest and perhaps most commonly referred to explanations in popular culture depend on sex-role training, teaching boys and girls their culturally appropriate roles. But when trying to understand gender on the interactional/cultural dimension, the means by which status differences shape expectations and the ways in which in-group and out-group membership influence behavior need to be at the center of attention. Too little attention has been paid to how inequality is shaped by such cultural expectations during interaction. I return to this in the section below. On the institutional dimension, we look to law, organizational practices, and formal regulations that distinguish by sex category. Much progress has been made in the post–civil rights era with rewriting formal laws and organizational practices to ensure gender neutrality. Unfortunately, we have often found that despite changes in gender socialization and gender neutrality on the institutional dimension, gender stratification remains.

What I have attempted to do here is to offer a conceptual organizing scheme for the study of gender that can help us to understand gender in all its complexity and try to isolate the social processes that create gender in each dimension. This is necessary before we can begin to imagine how to change these processes and thus to change the way we socially construct gender. Table 1 provides a schematic outline of this argument.[2]

Cultural Expectations during Interaction and the Stalled Revolution

In *Gender Vertigo* (Risman 1998), I suggested that at this moment in history, gender inequality between partners in American heterosexual couples could be attributed particularly to the interactional expectations at the cultural level: the differential expectations attached to being a mother and father, a husband and wife. Here, I extend this argument in two ways. First, I propose that the stalled gender revolution in other settings can similarly be traced to the interactional/cultural dimension of the social structure. Even when women and men with feminist identities work in organizations with formally gender-neutral rules, gender inequality is reproduced during everyday interaction. The cultural expectations attached to our sex category, simply being identified as a woman or man, has remained relatively impervious to the feminist forces that have problematized sexist socialization practices and legal discrimination. I discuss some of those processes that can help

TABLE 1:   Dimensions of Gender Structure, by Illustrative Social Processes

		Dimensions of the Gender Structure	
	Individual Level	Interactional Cultural Expectations	Institutional Domain
Social Processes[a]	Socialization Internalization Identity work Construction of selves	Status expectations Cognitive bias Othering Trading power for patronage Altercasting	Organizational practices Legal regulations Distribution of resources Ideology

a. These are examples of social processes that may help explain the gender structure on each dimension. They are meant to be illustrative and not a complete list of all possible social processes or causal mechanisms.

explain why social interaction continues to reproduce inequality, even in settings that seem ripe for social change.

Contemporary social psychological writings offer us a glimpse of possibilities for understanding how inequality is reconstituted in daily interaction. Ridgeway and her colleagues (Ridgeway 1991, 1997, 2001; Ridgeway and Correll 2000; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999) showed that the status expectations attached to gender and race categories are cross-situational. These expectations can be thought of as one of the engines that re-create inequality even in new settings where there is no other reason to expect male privilege to otherwise emerge. In a sexist and racist society, women and all persons of color are expected to have less to contribute to task performances than are white men, unless they have some other externally validated source of prestige. Status expectations create a cognitive bias toward privileging those of already high status. What produces status distinction, however, is culturally and historically variable. Thus, cognitive bias is one of the causal mechanisms that help to explain the reproduction of gender and race inequality in everyday life. It may also be an important explanation for the reproduction of class and heterosexist inequality in everyday life as well, but that is an empirical question.

Schwalbe and his colleagues (2000, 419) suggested that there are other "generic interactive processes through which inequalities are created and reproduced in everyday life." Some of these processes include othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management. Schwalbe and his colleagues suggested that subordinates' adaptation plays an essential role in their own disadvantage. Subordinate adaptation helps to explain women's strategy to adapt to the gender structure. Perhaps the most common adaptation of women to subordination is "trading power for patronage" (Schwalbe et al. 2000, 426). Women, as wives and daughters, often derive significant compensatory benefits from relationships with the men in their families. Stombler and Martin (1994) similarly showed how little sisters in a fraternity trade affiliation for secondary status. In yet another setting,

elite country clubs, Sherwood (2004) showed how women accept subordinate status as "B" members of clubs, in exchange for men's approval, and how when a few wives challenge men's privilege, they are threatened with social ostracism, as are their husbands. Women often gain the economic benefits of patronage for themselves and their children in exchange for their subordinate status.

One can hardly analyze the cultural expectations and interactional processes that construct gender inequality without attention to the actions of members of the dominant group. We must pay close attention to what men do to preserve their power and privilege. Schwalbe et al. (2000) suggested that one process involved is when superordinate groups effectively "other" those who they want to define as subordinate, creating devalued statuses and expectations for them. Men effectively do this in subversive ways through "politeness" norms, which construct women as "others" in need of special favors, such as protection. By opening doors and walking closer to the dirty street, men construct women as an "other" category, different and less than independent autonomous men. The cultural significance attached to male bodies signifies the capacity to dominate, to control, and to elicit deference, and such expectations are perhaps at the core of what it means for men to do gender (Michael Schwalbe, personal communication).

These are only some of the processes that might be identified for understanding how we create gender inequality based on embodied cultural expectations. None are determinative causal predictors, but instead, these are possible leads to reasonable and testable hypotheses about the production of gender. I offer them as part of a conceptual scheme to help us think about how different kinds of processes are implicated at each dimension of the gender structure. Martin's (2003) research on men and women workers in a corporate setting can help illustrate how such a conceptual scheme might work. She wrote about a male vice-president's asking his female counterpart to pick up a phone call, which she does unreflectively, but she soon thereafter identifies this request as problematic. Martin presented this as an example of how interactional status expectations attached to sex category create inequality within professional relationships. This empirical example supports the thesis that shared but routine cultural expectations re-create inequality even without the conscious intent of the actors. Gender structure theory does not presume that this man and woman do not bring gendered selves to the office to accept Martin's analysis. In fact, one might suggest that a vice-president who had more thoroughly internalized traditional femininity norms would not have noticed the inequity at all. Nor does one need to have a company that has purged all discriminatory practices from its policies to see the import of the cultural expectations that Martin identified. A meta-analysis that looks at the effects of gender inequality in the workplace should integrate findings about social processes at the level of individual identities, cultural expectations, and organizational practices. In the next section of this article, I provide empirical illustrations of this conceptual scheme of gender as a social structure.

Empirical Illustrations

I begin with an example from my own work of how conceptualizing gender as a social structure helps to organize the findings and even push forward an understanding of the resistance toward an egalitarian division of family work among contemporary American heterosexual couples. This is an area of research that incorporates a concern with nurturing children, housework, and emotional labor. My own question, from as early as graduate school, was whether men could mother well enough that those who care about children's well-being would want them to do so. Trained in the warfare model of science, my dissertation was a test of structural versus individualist theories (Kanter 1977) of men's mothering. As someone who considered herself a structuralist of some generic sort, I hypothesized (Risman 1983) that when men were forced into the social role of primary parent, they could become just like mothers: The parenting role (e.g., a measure of family structure) would wipe out the effects of individual gendered selves in my models. What I found was, alas, more complicated. At the time, I concluded that men could "mother" but did not do so in ways identical to women (Risman 1983). After having been influenced by studies showing that tokenism worked differently when men were the tokens (Williams 1992; Zimmer 1988) and that money could not buy power in marriage for women quite as it seemed to for men (Brines 1994; Ferree 1990), I came to the realization that gender itself was a structure and would not disappear when men and women were distributed across the variety of structural positions that organize our social world.

To ask the question, Can men mother, presuming that gender itself is a social structure leads us to look at all the ways that gender constrains men's mothering and under what conditions those change. Indeed, one of my most surprising, and unanticipated, findings was that single fathers who were primary caretakers came to describe themselves more often than other men with adjectives such as "nurturant," "warm," and "child oriented," those adjectives we social scientists use to measure femininity. Single fathers' identities changed based on their experiences as primary parents. In my research, men whose wives worked full-time did not, apparently, do enough mothering to have such experiences influence their own sense of selves. Most married fathers hoard the opportunity for leisure that frees them from the responsibilities of parenting that might create such identity change. My questions became more complicated but more useful when I conceptualized gender as a social structure. When and under what conditions do gendered selves matter? When do interactional expectations have the power to overcome previous internalized predispositions? What must change at the institutional level allow for expectations to change at the interactional level? Does enough change on the interactional dimension shift the moral accountability that then leads to collective action in social organizations? Could feminist parents organize and create a social movement that forces workplaces to presume that valuable workers also have family responsibilities?

These questions led me to try to identify the conditions that enable women and men to actually succeed in creating egalitarian relationships. My next research project was an in-depth interview and qualitative study of heterosexual couples raising children who equally shared the work of earning a living and the family labor of child care, homemaking, and emotion work. The first interesting piece of data was how hard it was to find such people in the end of the twentieth century, even when recruiting at daycare centers, parent-teacher associations, university venues, and feminist newsletters (all in the southeastern United States). Three out of four volunteer couples failed the quite generous criteria for inclusion: Working approximately the same number of hours in the labor force (within five hours per week), sharing the household labor and child care tasks within a 60/40 split, and both partners' describing the relationship as equitable. There are clearly fewer couples who live equal lives than those who wish fervently that they did so.

What I did find from intensive interviews and home observations with 20 such couples was that the conditions that enabled their success spread across each dimension of the gender structure. Although I would have predicted otherwise (having once been committed to a purely structural theory of human behavior), selves and personalities matter. The women in my sample were strong, directive women married to relatively laidback men. Given the overwhelming gendered expectations for men's privilege in heterosexual marriage, this should have been expected, but to someone with my theoretical background, it was not. Less surprising to me, the women in these couples also had at least the income and career status of their partners and often bettered them. But this is not usually enough to dent men's privilege, or we would have far more egalitarian marriages by now. In addition, these couples were ideologically committed to equality and to sharing. They often tried explicitly to create social relationships with others who held similar values, for example, by joining liberal churches to meet like-minded others. Atypical gendered selves and shared feminist-inspired cultural expectations were important conditions for equality, but they were not enough. Men's workplace flexibility mattered as well. Nearly every father in this sample was employed in a job with flexible working hours. Many women worked in jobs with flexibility as well, but not as uniformly as their male partners. These were privileged, educated workers for whom workplace flexibility was sometimes simply luck (e.g., a father who lost a corporate job and decided to sell real estate) but more often was a conscious choice (e.g., clinical psychologists choosing to teach at a small college to have more control over working hours despite decreased earning power). Thus, these couples experienced enabling contexts at the level of their individual selves, feminist ideology to help shape the cultural expectations in their most immediate environments (within the dyad and among at least some friends), and the privilege within the economy to have or find flexible jobs. By attending to each dimension of the gender structure, I amassed a more effective explanation for their ability to negotiate fair relationships than I could have without attention to selves, couple interaction, and their workplaces. The implications for feminist social change are direct: We cannot simply attend to socializing children differently, nor creating moral accountability for men

to share family work, nor fighting for flexible, family-friendly workplaces. We must attend to all simultaneously.

The research on gender in occupational settings (Williams 1992; Zimmer 1988) and quantitative studies of household division of labor (Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000) also provide good examples of how using gender structure as a conceptual framework can help organize meta-analytic reviews of the literature to create cumulative knowledge. Kanter's (1977) early structural hypotheses presumed that tokenism per se was an important mechanism that explained women's and men of color's continued subordination in the labor force. But as research testing this tokenism hypothesis expanded to include men in women's jobs, it became clear that the theory was not indeed only about numbers. Tokenism did not work the same way for white men. Men tokens rode glass escalators while women and racial minorities hit glass ceilings (Reskin 1998; Williams 1992; Yoder 1991). Gender and race remained important; the cultural interactional expectations remained different even in integrated work settings. Status expectations (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway et al. 1998) favored men and devalued women, whatever their numbers. We can conceptualize this as the interactional cultural level impeding further changes that realignments on the institutional dimension would predict.

Similarly, quantitative research findings about the household division of labor have made it quite clear that even when women work outside the home full-time, they shoulder the majority of household and child care. Over time, researchers have tested a variety of theories for why, sometimes presuming that as time pressures and resources equalized between husbands and wives, so too would the burden of household labor (Bianchi et al. 2000; Coverman 1985; Pleck 1985; Presser 1994; Shelton 1992). Not so. The data are unequivocal. Even in dual worker families, women do considerably more work and retain the majority of responsibility, even if they do share (or perhaps delegate) some of the family work to husbands and children. Sociology has provided solid evidence (Fenstermaker Berk 1985; Greenstein 1996, 2000; Robinson and Milkie 1998; Twiggs, McQuillan, and Ferree 1999) that domestic work, whether cleaning toilets or changing diapers, is as much about the production and display of gender as it is about clean toilets and dry bottoms. But such information only gets us so far analytically. We can integrate such research by asking questions about when and how the different effects of the gender structure remain resistant to change and when some progressive feminist change has occurred. Do young women in the twenty-first century, raised by feminists, successfully negotiate fair families? Or does the moral accountability to do gender as mothers and wives combined with devalued status in the workplace still defeat even women socialized for equality? Does workplace flexibility for men allow feminist women more success in their negotiations at the family level? The conceptualization of gender as a structure, and attention to the mechanisms at work in each dimension of the gender structure, helps to frame the kind of research that might answer such queries.

Gender structure theory allows us to try to disentangle the "how" questions without presuming that there is one right answer, for all places, times, and contexts.

It is easy to illustrate that a combination of gender wage gap and the organization of careers requiring inflexible hours and full-time commitment pushes married mothers outside the labor force and creates stressful lives for mothers who remain within it, married or not. But we must still ask why this is true for women but not men. Perhaps, under some conditions, women socialized for emphasized femininity do indeed hold themselves accountable for being personally responsible for more than good enough mothering and sparkling households. Research should identify under what conditions and to what extent gendered selves help to account for objective inequalities (e.g., women working more hours a day than their partners) and when other factors are more significant. My own hypothesis is that feminist women are often defeated in their attempt at egalitarian heterosexual relationships by cultural gendered interactional expectations. Within the past year, memoirs have been written by young feminists, academics, and daughters of famous women's movement leaders (Fox 2003; Hanauer 2002) bemoaning the impossible expectations facing career women who choose motherhood as well. Similarly, a recent feminist cyberspace conversation on the Listserve of Sociologists for Women in Society described the struggle to combine motherhood and career in the academy in nearly as despairing a tone as did Arlie Hochschild (1975) in her classic article first published three decades ago. I have yet to see recent memoirs, or hear of painful listserver conversations, among twenty-first-century fathers. Little cultural change has occurred around fathering. Most men are still not morally responsible for the quality of family life, and women have yet to discover how to avoid being held accountable.

Gender structures are even more complicated than my discussion suggests thus far because how gender identities are constructed on the individual and cultural dimensions vary tremendously over time and space. Even within contemporary American society, gender structures vary by community, social class, ethnicity, and race.

GENDER STRUCTURE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Perhaps the most important development in feminist thought in the last part of the twentieth century was the increasing concern with intersectionality (Andersen and Collins 1994; Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1994; Collins 1990). Women of color had been writing about intersectionality from nearly the start of the second wave of feminist scholarship. It was, however, not until several decades into the women's movement when they were heard and moved from margin closer to center (Myers et al. 1998). There is now considerable consensus growing that one must always take into consideration multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the whiteness of women, the maleness of people of color, and the heterosexuality of everyone.

I concur with this consensus that gender must be understood within the context of the intersecting domains of inequality. The balkanization of research and theory

into specializations of race or ethnicity or gender or stratification has undermined a sophisticated analysis of inequality (but see Reskin 2002; Schwalbe et al. 2000; Tilly 1999). I do not agree, however, with an operational strategy for scholarship that suggests the appropriate analytic solution is to only work within an inter-sectionality framework. While various axes of domination are always intersecting, the systems of inequality are not necessarily produced or re-created with identical social processes. The historical and current mechanisms that support gender inequality may or may not be those that are most significant for other kinds of oppression; whether this is the case is an empirical question. Gender research and theory can never again ignore how women's subordination differs within racial and ethnic communities or is constructed within class dynamics. Yet we should not therefore only study gender, race, and class simultaneously. There is a difference between an analysis of psychological, historical, or sociological mechanisms that construct inequality and the subjective experience of the outcomes of such mecha-nisms. There may be similarity of outcomes (e.g., experiences of oppression) along axes of oppression that arise from different causal mechanisms, but that is an empirical question, not a logical necessity. To focus all investigations into the com-plexity or subjective experience of interlocking oppressions would have us lose access to how the mechanisms for different kinds of inequality are produced. Femi-nist scholarship needs a both/and strategy (Collins 1998). We cannot study gender in isolation from other inequalities, nor can we only study inequalities' intersection and ignore the historical and contextual specificity that distinguishes the mechanisms that produce inequality by different categorical divisions, whether gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or class.

Calhoun (2000) exemplifies this both/and strategy in her argument that heterosexism cannot simply be understood as gender oppression and merged into feminist theory. She argued that we must study heterosexism as a separate system of oppression. While it is clearly the case that gender subordination and heterosexism support one another, and a gendered analysis of homophobia is criti-cal, the two oppressions should not be conflated. It is often presumed that Rich's (1980) argument about "compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence" sug-gests that heterosexism is primarily a product of men's dominance, an attempt to ensure sexual access to women by men, and that this is a primary explanation for lesbian oppression. While this is surely an important component of heterosexism, Calhoun argued that it is a mistake to presume that it is the whole of it. She sug-gested instead that challenging men's dominance is a necessary condition of ending the subordination of lesbians and gay men but not a sufficient condition to end such oppression. It is important for analytic clarity, and therefore to the scholarly contri-bution to social change, to identify causal mechanisms for heterosexism and gender oppression distinctly.

Other examples also illustrate the analytic usefulness of paying attention to the distinct properties of different axes of oppression. Gendered images support racial domination, but racial domination can hardly be attributed to gender inequality. For example, Black men's inferiority gets promoted through constructions of hyper-

sexuality (Collins 2004), and Black women's inferiority gets promoted through sexualized images such as Jezebel or welfare queen (Collins 2000). Similarly, Asian American men's autonomy and even citizenship rights were abrogated by constructions of effeminacy (Espiritu 1997). Yet it is implausible to argue that racial domination is nothing but a product of gender oppression. While we must pay attention to how axes of oppression affect one another and how the experience of their oppressions are simultaneous, we must continue to study and work to transform each one independently as well as in conjunction with one another.

Each categorical inequality (Tilly 1999) that is deeply embedded in society can be conceptualized as a social structure. Bonilla-Silva (1997) has made this argument persuasively for conceptualizing race as a social structure. He argued that race is a social structure that influences identities and attitudes but is also incorporated into how opportunities and constraints work throughout every societal institution. According to Bonilla-Silva, to conceptualize race as a social structure forces us to move beyond seeing racial inequality as constructed simply by racist attitudes and to understand the ways in which our society embeds white privilege at every level of analysis. I hardly need to argue that class inequality should be conceptualized as a structure as the economic structure of society has long been a primary concern of social scientists. Similarly, political structures have long been studied both at the national and comparative level because here too, politics are routinely considered a basic component of human society. My argument is that race, gender, and sexuality are as equally fundamental to human societies as the economy and the polity. Those inequalities that are fundamentally embedded throughout social life, at the level of individual identities, cultural expectations embedded into interaction, and institutional opportunities and constraints are best conceptualized as structures: The gender structure, the race structure, the class structure, and the sexuality structure. This does not imply that the social forces that produced, nor the causal mechanisms at work in the daily reproduction of inequality within each structure, are of similar strength or type at any given historical moment. For example, gender and race structures extend considerably further into everyday life in the contemporary American context, at home and at work, than does the political structure.[3] I propose this structural language as a tool to help disentangle the means by which inequalities are constructed, recreated, and—it is hoped—transformed or deconstructed. The model for how gender structure works, with consequences for individuals, interactions/cultural expectations, and institutions, can be generalized to the study of other equally embedded inequalities such as race and sexuality. Each structure of inequality exists on its own yet coexists with every other structure of inequality. The subjective experience of actual human beings is always of intersecting inequalities, but the historical construction and contemporary reproduction of inequality on each axis may be distinct. Oppressions can be loosely or tightly coupled, can have both common and distinct generative mechanisms.

THEORY WRESTLING WITH ACTIVISM

Within any structure of inequality, perhaps the most important question a critical scholar must ask is, What mechanisms are currently constructing inequality, and how can these be transformed to create a more just world? If as critical scholars, we forget to keep our eye on social transformation, we may slip without intention into the implicitly value-free role of social scientists who study gender merely to satisfy intellectual curiosity (Risman 2003). The central questions for feminists must include a focus on social transformation, reducing inequality, and improving the status of women. A concern with social change brings us to the thorny and as yet too little explored issue of agency. When do subordinate groups collectively organize to challenge their oppression? When do superordinate groups mobilize to resist? How do we know agency when we see it, and how can we support feminist versions of it?

Feminist scholarship must seek to understand how and why gender gets done, consciously or not, to help those who hope to stop doing it. I end by focusing our attention on what I see as the next frontier for feminist change agents: A focus on the processes that might spur change at the interactional or cultural dimension of the gender structure. We have begun to socialize our children differently, and while identities are hardly postgender, the sexism inherent in gender socialization is now widely recognized. Similarly, the organizational rules and institutional laws have by now often been rewritten to be gender neutral, at least in some nations. While gender-neutral laws in a gender-stratified society may have short-term negative consequences (e.g., displaced homemakers who never imagined having to support themselves after marriage), we can hardly retreat from equity in the law or organizations. It is the interactional and cultural dimension of gender that have yet to be tackled with a social change agenda.

Cognitive bias is one of the mechanisms by which inequality is re-created in everyday life. There are, however, documented mechanisms for decreasing the salience of such bias (Bielby 2000; Reskin 2000; Ridgeway and Correll 2000). When we consciously manipulate the status expectations attached to those in subordinate groups, by highlighting their legitimate expertise beyond the others in the immediate social setting, we can begin to challenge the nonconscious hierarchy that often goes unnoticed. Similarly, although many subordinates adapt to their situation by trading power for patronage, when they refuse to do so, interaction no longer flows smoothly, and change may result. Surely, when wives refuse to trade power for patronage, they can rock the boat as well as the cradle.

These are only a few examples of interactive processes that can help to explain the reproduction of inequality and to envision strategies for disrupting inequality. We need to understand when and how inequality is constructed and reproduced to deconstruct it. I have argued before (Risman 1998) that because the gender struc-

ture so defines the category woman as subordinate, the deconstruction of the category itself is the best, indeed the only sure way, to end gender subordination. There is no reason, except the transitional vertigo that will accompany the process to dismantle it, that a utopian vision of a just world involves any gender structure at all. Why should we need to elaborate on the biological distinction between the sexes? We must accommodate reproductive differences for the process of biological replacement, but there is no a priori reason we should accept any other role differentiation simply based on biological sex category. Before accepting any gender elaboration around biological sex category, we ought to search suspiciously for the possibly subtle ways such differentiation supports men's privilege. Once two salient groups exist, the process of in-group and out-group distinctions and in-group opportunity hoarding become possible. While it may be that for some competitive sports, single-sex teams are necessary, beyond that, it seems unlikely that any differentiation or cultural elaboration around sex category has a purpose beyond differentiation in support of stratification.

Feminist scholarship always wrestles with the questions of how one can use the knowledge we create in the interest of social transformation. As feminist scholars, we must talk beyond our own borders. This kind of theoretical work becomes meaningful if we can eventually take it public. Feminist sociology must be public sociology (Burawoy forthcoming). We must eventually take what we have learned from our theories and research beyond professional journals to our students and to those activists who seek to disrupt and so transform gender relations. We must consider how the knowledge we create can help those who desire a more egalitarian social world to refuse to do gender at all, or to do it with rebellious reflexiveness to help transform the world around them. For those without a sociological perspective, social change through socialization and through legislation are the easiest to envision. We need to shine a spotlight on the dimension of cultural interactional expectations as it is here that work needs to begin.

We must remember, however, that much doing gender at the individual and interactional levels gives pleasure as well as reproduces inequality, and until we find other socially acceptable means to replace that opportunity for pleasure, we can hardly advocate for its cessation. The question of how gender elaboration has been woven culturally into the fabric of sexual desire deserves more attention. Many of our allies believe that "viva la difference" is required for sexual passion, and few would find a postgender society much of a feminist utopia if it came at the cost of sexual play. No one wants to be part of a revolution where she or he cannot dirty dance.

In conclusion, I have made the argument that we need to conceptualize gender as a social structure, and by doing so, we can analyze the ways in which gender is embedded at the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society. This situates gender at the same level of significance as the economy and the polity. In addition, this framework helps us to disentangle the relative strength of a variety of causal mechanisms for explaining any given outcome without dismissing the possible relevance of other processes that are situated at different dimensions of

analysis. Once we have a conceptual tool to organize the encyclopedic research on gender, we can systematically build on our knowledge and progress to understanding the strength and direction of causal processes within a complicated multidimensional recursive theory. I have also argued that our concern with intersectionality must continue to be paramount but that different structures of inequality have different infrastructure and perhaps different influential causal mechanisms at any given historical moment. Therefore, we need to follow a both/and strategy, to understand gender structure, race structure, and other structures of inequality as they currently operate, while also systematically paying attention to how these axes of domination intersect. Finally, I have suggested that we pay more attention to doing research and writing theory with explicit attention to how our work can come to be "fighting words" (Collins 1998) to help transform as well as inform society. If we can identify the mechanisms that create gender, perhaps we can offer alternatives to them and so use our scholarly work to contribute to envisioning a feminist utopia.

NOTES

1. See Scott (1997) for a critique of feminists who adopt a strategy where theories have to be simplified, compared, and defeated. She too suggested a model where feminists build on the complexity of each others' ideas.

2. I thank my colleague Donald Tomaskovic-Devey for suggesting the visual representation of these ideas as well as his usual advice on my ideas as they develop.

3. One can certainly imagine a case where political structures extend far into everyday life, a nation in the midst of civil war or in the grips of a fascist state. One can also envision a case when race retreats to the personal dimension, as when the Irish became white in twentieth-century America.

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