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# GenderVertigo

**american families in transition**

# 2

## Gender as Structure

There are three distinct theoretical traditions that help us to understand sex and gender, and a fourth is now taking shape. The first tradition focuses on gendered selves, whether sex differences are biological or social in origin. The second tradition, which emerged as a reaction to the first, 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 contextual issues and how doing gender re-creates inequality during interaction. The fourth, multilevel approach treats gender itself as built in to social life via socialization, interaction, and institutional organization. This new perspective integrates the previous ones; it is formed on the assumption that each viewpoint sheds different light on the same question. This book contributes to this developing integrative and multilevel perspective.

### Gendered Selves

There are numerous theoretical perspectives within this tradition, but all share the assumption that maleness and femaleness are, or become, properties of individuals. That is why I see this as an individualist approach. Research questions in this tradition focus on the development of sex differences and their relative importance for behavior.

The "natural" difference argument gained renewed interest with the development of sociobiology (e.g., Wilson 1975 and Van den

Berghe 1979) and biosociology (Rossi 1977, 1984). Sociobiologists have argued that such behaviors as male aggressiveness and female nurturance result from natural selection. Biosociologists stress the infant care skills in which females appear to excel. Their perspective has been criticized for its ethnocentrism and its selective use of biological species as evidence (see Epstein 1988).

More recent biosocial theories have posited complex interactions between environment and biological predispositions, with attention to explaining intrasex differences. This new version of biosociology may eventually help to identify the biological parameters that, in interaction with environmental stimuli, affect human behavior. An interesting example of such work is Booth and Dabbs' (1992) research linking high testosterone levels in men with poor marriages. But the researchers hypothesize that the relation between testosterone levels and marital quality may manifest itself only — or more strongly — among certain males, particularly those without a strong internal locus of control. Thus, they suggest a complex interaction between the social and the biological.

Sex-role socialization theorists explain the differences between men's and women's behavior in intimate relationships by relying not on "nature" but on more sophisticated ideas. Connell (1987) suggests that the shift from biological assumptions allowed theorists to address the connections between social structure and the formation of personality. A voluminous literature developed on agencies of socialization, particularly the family. Sex role theory suggests that early childhood socialization is an influential determinant of later behavior, and research has focused on how societies create feminine women and masculine men.

There is an impressive variety of sex-role explanations for gender-differentiated behavior in families. Perhaps the most commonly accepted explanation is reinforcement theory (e.g., Bandura and Walters 1963, Mischel 1966, and Weitzman 1979). Reinforcement

theory suggests, for example, that girls develop nurturant personalities because they are given praise and attention for their interest in dolls and babies, and that boys develop competitive selves because they are positively reinforced for winning, whether at checkers or football. Although much literature suggests that the socialization experiences of boys and girls continue to differ dramatically, it is clearly the case that most girls raised in the 1990s have received ambiguous gender socialization: they have been taught to desire domesticity (dolls remain a popular toy for girls), as well as to pursue careers. For generations, African American girls have been socialized both for motherhood and paid work (Collins 1990).

Nancy Chodorow's (1978, 1989) feminist psychoanalytic analysis approach has also been influential, particularly in feminist scholarship. Chodorow develops an object-relations psychoanalytic perspective to explain how gendered personalities develop as a result of exclusively female mothering. She focuses on how the relationship between infant and mother, in the pre-oedipal period, shapes feminine and masculine personalities. Chodorow notices, as did Freud (1933) and Parsons (1954), that mothers are responsible for young children almost universally. She argues that mothers relate to their boy and girl infants differently, fusing identities with their daughters while relating to their sons as separate and distinct. As a result, according to this feminist version of psychoanalysis, girls develop selves based on connectedness and relationships while boys develop selves based on independence and autonomy. In addition, boys must reject their first love-object (mother) in order to adopt masculinity, and they do this by rejecting and devaluing what is feminine in themselves and in society. Thus, we get nurturant women and independent men in a society dominated by men and which values independence. Many feminist studies have incorporated this psychoanalytic view of gender as an underlying assumption (L. Rubin 1982; Keller 1985; Williams 1989).

Just as psychoanalytic thought has influenced feminist scholarship, feminist theorizing about differences (Collins 1990) has influenced psychoanalytic theorizing. Chodorow (1994) has pushed her theoretical stance to incorporate the differences between women and between men by looking at how American families differ ethnically; she even speculates with cross-historical and international comparisons.

Other feminist theorists, such as Ruddick (1989, 1992) and Aptheker (1989), build on the notion that the constant nature of mothering creates a certain kind of thinking, what Ruddick calls "maternal thinking." The logic of this argument does not depend on a psychoanalytic framework, but it implicitly uses one: through nurturing their children women develop psychological frameworks that value peace and justice. Therefore, if women (or men who mothered children) were powerful political actors, governments would use more peaceful conflict resolution strategies and value social justice more highly.

All individualist theories, including sex-role socialization and psychoanalytic thought, posit that by adulthood most men and women have developed very different personalities. Women have become nurturant, person oriented, and child centered. Men have become competitive and work oriented. According to individualist theorists, there are limits to flexibility. Intensely held emotions, values, and inclinations developed during childhood coalesce into a person's self-identity. Although these theorists do not deny that social structures influence family patterns, nor that notions of gender meaning are always evolving (see especially Chodorow 1995), they focus on how culturally determined family patterns and sex-role socialization create gendered selves, which then provide the motivations for individuals to fill their socially appropriate roles.

Historically, sex-role theorists have assumed that men and women behave differently because gender resides primarily in per-

sonality. This approach has several serious conceptual weaknesses (for detailed analyses of such problems, see Connell 1987 and Ferree 1990). First, such theories usually presume behavioral continuity throughout the life course. In fact, women socialized for nurturance are capable of competitive and aggressive behavior, and men raised without any expectation of taking on primary responsibility can "mother" when they need to (Risman 1987; Gerson 1985, 1993; Bielby and Bielby 1984). Another weakness of these individualist-oriented theories is their oversocialized conception of human behavior—that once we know how an individual has been raised, the training is contained primarily inside his or her head (cf. Wrong 1961). Such theories might suggest, for example, that women do not revolt and are not necessarily unhappy with their subordinate status because they have been so well trained for femininity. While the development of gendered selves is clearly an important predictor of gender differences in adult relationships, Thorne's (1993) research shows dramatically the variability in developmental experiences of boys and girls.

This overdependence on internalization of culture and socialization leads to the most serious problem with sex-role theory: its depoliticization of gender inequality. Although sex-role socialization and revisionist psychoanalytic theorists often have explicitly feminist goals, their focus on sex differences has legitimated a dualistic conception of gender that relies on a reified male/female dichotomy. The very notion of comparing all men to all women without regard for diversity within groups presumes that gender is primarily about individual differences between biological males and biological females, downplaying the role of interactional expectations and the social structure.

The sex-role socialization theory is an application of a normative role theory for human behavior. It assumes that social stability is motivated primarily by beliefs and values acquired during social-

ization. Individuals are assumed to use whatever resources are available to realize these values and to maintain their identities. As Stokes and Hewitt (1976) have argued, socialization cannot serve as the fundamental link between culture and action. Indeed, studies of intergenerational shifts in values suggest that economic and political conditions produce beliefs, attitudes, and preferences for action that overcome those acquired during childhood (Lesthaeghe 1980; Inglehart 1977, 1981). We cannot assume that internalization of norms—through psychoanalytic processes or sex-role socialization—is the primary means by which society organizes human conduct.

In her review of findings based on meta-analytic research,[1] Eagly (1995) suggests that psychologists who study sex differences have reached a new consensus: empirical research does indeed support the existence of certain sex differences, and it confirms that many assumed differences are more myth than reality. Empirical analyses

1. It used to be that studies were synthesized and conclusions were drawn rather informally. In reviews of sex differences, for example, studies were dichotomized, with the number of those that found statistically significant differences balanced against those that did not. Often results were mixed and conclusions hard to draw. An even bigger problem was that the quality of the studies was not assessed, so that several studies that were methodologically weak might be considered more weighty than one very strong study. The most famous and influential of these reviews was by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974). In the new meta-analytic techniques, more information about each study is identified and coded quantitatively. The size of the sex difference, as well as the quality of the research methodology (including measures for central tendency of the effect sizes, distribution, measurement validity and reliability, and internal consistency), can all be incorporated into decisions about which sex differences actually exist in the sample population. Computer analyses weight variables and identify which differences exist based on the strongest methodologies. Although this quantitative review technique cannot overcome major limitations in the quality of the studies assessed, it does offer substantial gains over reviews that use a more impressionistic reading of the literature.

consistently find differences in quantitative problem solving among adolescents and adults, differences in visual spatial ability, and differences in verbal fluency. Some nontrivial differences in aspects of social interaction and personality are reported. "The question of *whether* sex differences exist has evolved into the more demanding question of *why* the sexes differ considerably at some times and at other times differ moderately, minimally, or not at all" (Eagly 1995, 13). *Why* has become the question among psychologists; it is their question and mine.

## Structure vs. Personality

The overreliance on gendered selves as the primary explanation for sexual stratification led many feminist sociologists—myself included—to argue that what appear to be sex differences are really, in Epstein's terms, "deceptive distinctions" (Epstein 1988; Kanter 1977; Risman and Schwartz 1989). Although empirically documented sex differences do occur, structuralists like me have argued that men and women behave differently because they fill different positions in institutional settings, work organizations, or families. That is, the previous structural perspectives on gender assume that work and family structures create empirically distinct male and female behavior. Structuralist feminist sociologists (e.g., Kanter 1976, Risman 1987, Risman and Schwartz 1989, and Epstein 1988) have not usually conceptualized gender itself as a structure. Rather, most have argued that empirically documented sex differences are more apparent than real. Within this perspective, men and women in the same structural slots are expected to behave identically. Epstein's (1988) voluminous review of the multidisciplinary research on gender and sex differences is perhaps the strongest and most explicit support for a social-structural explanation of gendered behavior. She suggests that there are perhaps no empirically

documented differences that can be traced to the predispositions of males and females. Instead, the deceptive differences reflect women's lack of opportunity in a male-dominated society.

Gender relations in the labor force have received far more of this sort of structural analysis than have gender relations in intimate settings. Kanter's classic work *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977) introduced this kind of structural perspective on gender in the workplace. Kanter showed that when women had access to powerful mentors, interactions with people like themselves, and the possibility for upward mobility, they behaved like others — regardless of sex — with similar advantages. These social network variables could explain success at work far better than could assumptions of masculine versus feminine work styles. Women were less often successful because they were more often blocked from network advantages, not because they feared success or had never developed competitive strategies. Men who lacked such opportunities did not advance, and they behaved with stereotypical feminine work styles. Kanter argued persuasively that structural system properties better explain sex differences in workplace behavior than does sex-role socialization.

A large body of research has been built on Kanter's ideas concerning apparent gender differences and actual inequality in the labor force (e.g., Thompson 1981, Rosenfield 1979, Lorber 1984, Baron and Bielby 1985, and Geis et al. 1984). This focus on structural inequities in gender relations has become a mainstream perspective in sociological studies of women in the work force (Reskin 1989).

The application of a structural perspective to gender within personal relationships has been less frequent, but at least two explicit attempts have been made. In a series of studies (Risman 1986, 1987, 1988), I tested whether apparent sex differences in parenting styles are better attributed to sex-role socialization or to the structural

contingencies of adult life. The question I asked was "Can men mother?" The answer is yes, but only if they do not have women to do it for them. The lack of sex-role socialization for nurturance did not inhibit the development of male mothering when structural contingencies demanded it. This is an important part of the story, but not all of it.

Gerson's qualitative research (1985, 1993) also provides strong support for a structural theory of gender (she uses the term "developmental" rather than structural). On the basis of retrospective interview data, Gerson reports that half her sample of baby-boom women changed their orientation between domesticity and commitment to work (in both directions) from young adulthood to their early thirties. Gerson suggests that four variables explain the change in orientation: marital stability, the perceived sufficiency of the husband's wage, women's opportunities and experiences in the labor force, and the existence of support networks for domestic wives. Adolescent plans and sex-role socialization did not predict adult choices. Gerson provides similar evidence about men's choices: plans made in adolescence were not accurate predictors of men's family involvement. Labor force experiences and marital stability were better explanations for men's family lives than were their hopes or dreams based on gender socialization.

While applications of structural perspectives both to workplaces and to intimate relationships have furthered the sociological understanding of gender, there is a fundamental flaw in the logic of these arguments. I have claimed elsewhere, as did Kanter a decade before, that if women and men were to experience identical structural conditions and roles expectations, empirically observable gender differences would dissipate. It seemed to me then that gender would nearly disappear when external structural conditions and roles converge for women and men; that is, when structure rather than socialization creates behavior. Now I believe that this

is accurate only if we realize that gender itself is a structure deeply embedded in our society.

Research findings led to my reassessment of gender-neutral structural theories: several studies (Williams 1992; Yoder 1991; Zimmer 1988) found that Kanter's hypotheses about the explanatory power of social structural variables such as relative numbers, access to mentors, and upward mobility are not, in fact, gender neutral. That is, Kanter's hypotheses are supported empirically only when societally devalued groups enter traditionally white male work environments. When white males enter traditionally female work environments, they do not hit the glass ceiling, they ride glass elevators. Reskin (1988) has suggested that we have so accepted these "structural" arguments that we sometimes forget that sexism itself stratifies our labor force. Evidence similarly points to continued existence of gendered behavior in family settings. Hertz reported that in her 1986 study of couples in which husbands and wives hold equivalent, high-status corporate jobs and brought similar resources to their marriages, the wives continue to shoulder more responsibility for family work (even if that means hiring and supervising help). Despite the importance of structural variables in explaining behavior in families, the sex category itself remains a powerful predictor of who does what kind of family work (Brines 1994; South and Spitz 1994). Gender stratification remains even when other structural aspects of work or of family life are divorced from sex category. The interactionist theory discussed below helps us to understand why.

## Doing Gender

This approach to gender was best articulated by West and Zimmerman in their 1987 article "Doing Gender." I believe that they too were reacting to the overdeterminative nature of the sex-differences approach. West and Zimmerman suggest that once a person

is labeled a member of a sex category, she or he is morally accountable for behaving as persons in that category do. That is, the person is expected to "do gender"; the ease of interaction depends on it. One of the groundbreaking aspects in this argument is that doing gender implies legitimating inequality. The authors suggest that, by definition, what is female in a patriarchal society is devalued. Within this theoretical framework, the very belief that biological males and females are essentially different (apart from their reproductive capabilities) exists to justify male dominance.

The tradition of doing gender has been well accepted in feminist sociology (West and Zimmerman's article was cited in journals more than one hundred times by 1995). West and Zimmerman articulated an insight whose time had come—that gender is not what we are but something that we do. Psychologists Deaux and Major (1990) use similarly interactional theories to explain gender. They argue that much of the literature on sex difference is inaccurate because it measures behavior but pays no attention to interaction. They suggest that interactional contexts take priority over individual traits and personality differences; others' expectations create the self-fulfilling prophecies that lead all of us to do gender. Deaux and Major go beyond simply endorsing an interactional theory, however. They suggest that actual behavior depends on the interaction of participants' self-definitions, the expectations of others, and the cultural expectations attached to the context itself. I agree. The weakness in the doing gender approach is that it undertheorizes the pervasiveness of gender inequality in organizations and gendered identities.

Although gender is always present in our interaction, it is not present only in interaction. We must have a theoretical link from material constraints to what we do now, to who we think we are. I suggest that the doing-gender perspective is incomplete because it slights the institutional level of analysis and the links among institu-

tional gender stratification, situational expectations, and gendered selves.

West and Fenstermaker (1995) have extended the argument from doing gender to "doing difference." They suggest that just as we create inequality when we create gender during interaction, so we create race and class inequalities when we interact in daily life. Race does not generally hold the biologically based assumption of dichotomy (as sex category does), yet in American society we constantly use race categories to guide our interactional encounters. This extension of theoretical ideas from gender to the analysis of inequalities is perhaps the most important direction gender theorizing has taken in the past decade. Black feminist thought (see particularly Brewer 1989, P. Collins 1990, hooks 1984, and King 1988) has sensitized many white feminists to the notion that theories of "women" have often assumed that middle-class white women represent the entire category. As I describe the emerging perspective within which I work, I want to stress that even though gender is a structure in every context, the actual content can vary dramatically. What does not vary is that gender is the basis for sexual stratification (Lorber 1994).

## Gender as Social Structure

The sex-differences literature, the doing-gender contextual analyses, and the structural perspectives are not necessarily incompatible, although I, as well as others, have portrayed them as alternatives (e.g., Kanter 1977, Epstein 1988, Risman 1987, Risman and Schwartz 1989, and Ferree 1990). More recently, England and Browne (1992) argued persuasively that every sociological theory makes implicit assumptions about internalized states and external social control. Chodorow also argues (1995) that we must study gender as both a personal and cultural construction; the psyche can deal only with material experienced in our world as it is currently

structured. While most structural theories focus only on external social constraint, I follow England and Browne's (1992) argument that all external constraints eventually affect selves; my empirical question is after how long and with what force. I am also convinced by Chodorow's argument (1995) that we must attend to individual selves—and gender meaning at this level—because individuals choose to make social change. My view of gender as a social structure incorporates each level of analysis, even if my major focus here is more narrow.

Lorber (1994) argues that gender is an entity in and of itself that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders social processes of everyday life, and is built into all other major social organizations of society. She goes further, however, to argue that gender difference is *primarily* a means to justify sexual stratification. Gender is so ubiquitous because unless we see difference, we cannot justify inequality. Lorber provides much cross-cultural, literary, and scientific evidence to show that gender difference is socially constructed and yet is universally used to justify stratification. She writes 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" (33).

I build on this notion that gender is an entity in and of itself and has consequences at every level of analysis. And I share the concern that the very creation of difference is the foundation on which inequality rests. In my view, it is most useful to conceptualize gender as a structure that has consequences for every aspect of society. And while the language of structure suits my purposes better than any other, it is not ideal. Despite its ubiquity in sociological discourse, no definition of the term "structure" is widely shared (see Smelser 1988 for a review of various structural traditions). So I begin by explaining what I mean by structure and how I have derived my definition. Some consensus exists. All structuralists presume that

social structures exist outside individual desires or motives and that the structures can at least partially explain human action. All structural theorists would agree that social structure constrains human action or makes it possible.

Blau's (1977) now classic definition of social structure focused solely on the constraint that collective life imposes on the individual. In their influential work, Blau and his colleagues (e.g., Rytina et al. 1988) have 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. Structure must be conceptualized, in this 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. I incorporate Blau's analysis of structure as constraint, but I reject the notion that structure constrains action only externally.

In order to analyze human action, we must understand not only how the social structure acts as constraint but also how and why actors choose one alternative over another. Burt (1982) suggests that actors compare themselves and their options to those in structurally similar positions. In this view, actors are purposive, rationally seeking to maximize their self-perceived well-being under social structural constraints.[2] Actions are a function of interests, but interests and ability to choose are patterned by the social structure. Burt suggests that norms develop when actors occupying similar network positions in the social structure evaluate their own options

2. Burt's notion of purposive and rational action differs from that of more atomistic theorists because he does not assume that actors necessarily have enough information to act effectively in their own best interest. Nor does he assume that the consequences of actions are necessarily intended.

vis-à-vis the alternatives of similarly situated others. From such comparisons evolve both norms and feelings of relative deprivation or advantage. The social structure as the context of daily life creates action indirectly by shaping actors' perceptions of their interests and directly by constraining choice.

Giddens' (1984) theory adds considerable depth to the analysis of social structures as existing in a recursive relationship to individuals. That is, social structures shape individuals even as individuals are shaping their social structure. Giddens rejects a structuralism (e.g., Blau 1977) that ignores the transformative power of human action. He insists that any structural theory must be concerned with reflexivity and actors' interpretations of their own lives. When people act on structure, they do so for their own reasons. We must, therefore, be concerned with why people act as they do. Giddens insists that this concern go beyond the verbal justification easily available from actors because much of social life is so routine that actors will not articulate, or even consider, why they act. Giddens refers to this reality as practical consciousness. I refer to it as the cultural aspect 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). Within this framework, we must pay considerable attention to how structure makes action possible as well as constrains it. We must bring individuals back into structural theories.

Connell (1987) applies Giddens' theory of social structure as both constraint and as created by action in his treatise on gender and power (see particularly chap. 5).[3] In his analysis, structure is assumed to specify what constrains action, and yet "since human action involves free invention . . . and is reflexive, practice can be
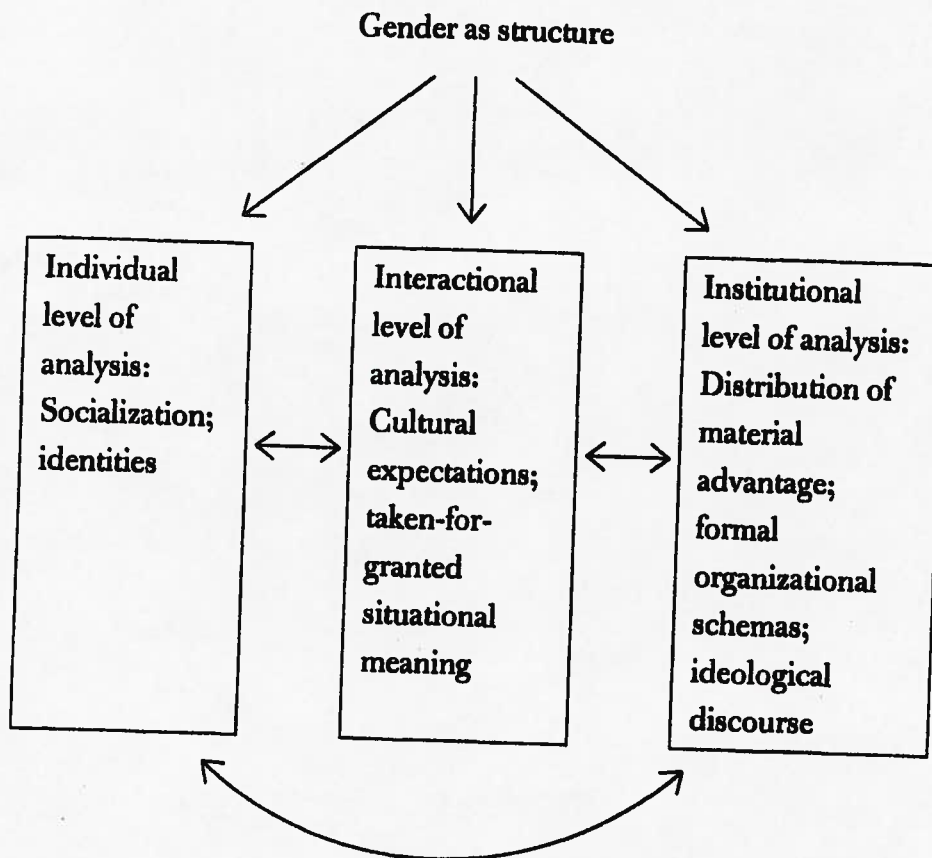
3. Connell refers to action as "practice."

turned against what constrains it; so structure can deliberately be the object of practice" (95). Action may turn against structure, but it can never escape it. An accurate analysis of any hierarchical relationship requires a focus both on how structure shapes interaction and on how human agency creates structure (Blackwelder 1993). A multilevel theory of gender as a social structure must acknowledge causality as recursive—action itself may change the immediate or future context. I build on Connell's analysis of the reflexivity of action and structure, although I return to that argument primarily in the last chapter.

Gender itself must be considered a structural property of society. It is not manifested just in our personalities, our cultural rules, or other institutions. Gender is deeply embedded as a basis for stratification, differentiating opportunities and constraints. This differentiation has consequences on three levels: (1) at the individual level, for the development of gendered selves; (2) at the interactional level, for men and women face different expectations even when they fill the identical structural position; and (3) at the institutional level, for rarely will women and men be given identical positions. Differentiation at the institutional level is based on explicit regulations or laws regarding resource distribution, whether resources be defined as access to opportunities or actual material goods. (See fig. 2.1 for a schematic summary of the argument thus far.)

While the *gender structure* clearly affects selves, cultural rules, and institutions, far too much explanatory power is presumed to rest in the motivation of gendered selves. We live in a very individualistic society that teaches us to make our own choices and take responsibility for our own actions. What this has meant for theories about gender is that a tremendous amount of energy is spent on trying to understand why women and men "choose" to devote their life energies to such different enterprises. The distinctly sociological contribution to the explanation hasn't had enough at-

## Figure 2.1.  Gender as Structure

Gender as structure

| Individual level of analysis: Socialization; identities | Interactional level of analysis: Cultural expectations; taken-for-granted situational meaning | Institutional level of analysis: Distribution of material advantage; formal organizational schemas; ideological discourse |
|---|---|---|

tention: even when individual women and men do *not* desire to live gendered lives or to support male dominance, they often find themselves compelled to do so by the logic of gendered choices. That is, interactional pressures and institutional design create gender and the resultant inequality, even in the absence of individual desires.

My argument and the data presented throughout this book show the strength of our gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels. Choices often assumed to be based on personalities and individual preferences (e.g., consequences of the gender structure at the individual level) are better understood as social con-

structions based on institutionally constrained opportunities and the limited availability of nongendered cognitive images. Eagly and Woods (1991) offer a useful conceptual scheme for understanding both the continued importance of gender at the individual level and how it differs from an understanding of gender at the contextual level.[4] They suggest that we see individual gendered selves and the cultural expectations of interaction as alternative paths by which gendered institutions influence individual behavior.

Even if individuals are capable of change and wish to eradicate male dominance from their personal lives, the influence of gendered institutions and interactional contexts persists. These contexts are organized by gender stratification at the institutional level, which includes the distribution of material resources organized by gender, the ways by which formal organizations and institutions themselves are gendered, and gendered ideological discourse. For example, in a society in which girls are not taught to read, we could never find a young woman who would be considered a potential international leader. Nor would men denied access to jobs with "family wages" be seen by middle-class American women as good catches for husbands.

At this moment in American society, cultural rules and cognitive images that operate at the interactional level are particularly important in the persistence of gender stratification in families. It is

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4. Eagly and Woods do not use the same language I use. I am confident that our conceptual schemes are parallel, and I prefer not to add still more inconsistent language to the text. They describe the institutional level of analysis as the "division of labor between the sexes in society." They use "gender role expectations" for the contextual/interactional level of analysis, and they refer to the individual level of analysis as sex-typed skills and beliefs. They are concerned with explaining empirically identified sex differences in social behavior as dependent variables in psychological research.

not that sex-role socialization or early childhood experience is trivial; gender structure creates gendered selves. But, at this point in history, sex-role socialization itself is ambivalent. In addition, it is clear that even women with feminist worldviews and substantial incomes are constrained by gender structures.

In spite of the removal of some gender discrimination in both law and organizations, gender stratification remains. That is, formal access to opportunities may be gender neutral, yet equality of results may not ensue. Therefore, neither the individual-level explanations nor those based solely on institutional discrimination can explain continued gender stratification in families. Instead, the cognitive images to which we must respond during interaction are the engines that drive continued gender stratification when individuals desire egalitarian relationships and the law allows them (cf. Ridgeway 1997).

## Expectations as a Cultural Component of Gender

Handel (1979) and Stokes and Hewitt (1976) provide a framework for integrating structural concerns and interactional theory that helps explain both persistence and change in gender relations. Their work also helps us understand how actors reproduce or contest the gendered contexts in which they find themselves. Handel suggests that normative requirements (e.g., cultural expectations) attached to various roles are inconsistent in modern societies. This "sociological ambivalence" makes it impossible to anticipate precisely the actions of any given person, though we sometimes can anticipate the statistical distributions of action. Individuals view the ambivalent social structure as a problem. Adaptive, situationally negotiated, and emergent conduct is their response. A major interactional task is to confront external structures to which conformity is impossible and to negotiate a situated order. Stokes and Hewitt suggest that culture is not an individualistic trait. Rather, culture is

a "learned field of objects that are environmental to action . . . a set of cognitive constraints—objects to which people must relate as they form lines of conduct" (847). Cultural expectations, consistent or ambivalent, become parameters for actions, much like physical constraints and personal history. They allow us to act meaningfully and effectively.

Gender expectations, thus, should be viewed not as internalized masculinity or femininity but as cognitive images (cf. Schwalbe 1987) that constrain action. Cognitive images exist as abstractions, but we have learned them over time both from interaction with others and through cultural images from television, movies, and other media. Every time we do gender we are reacting to cognitive images to which we are accountable, whether we like it or not. People must relate to gender expectations as they decide how to act. Unwritten rules and unspoken beliefs that are part of gender structures can be seen as accurate folklore that must be considered in every interaction. For example, we know that most wives schedule family time, whether or not any given woman actually chooses to do so. And some wives simply expect their husbands to share housework while their husbands view such "help" as a gift. We do not encounter such folklore in the abstract but in the expectations that are part and parcel of relationships. Once we subscribe to such folklore as a moral necessity of being a man or women, then we are motivated to behave morally, to do gender. We become emotionally invested in doing gender, which is one way that we show ourselves and others that we are, indeed, moral actors.

Yet the clarity by which doing gender shows moral worth is clouding as we close the twentieth century. Neither men nor women know when their gender assumptions will be shared by others of the same or opposite sex, even in their immediate social networks. Therefore, constant negotiation and incipient conflict exist even in the most intimate and loving relationships.

Hochschild's (1989) insightful analysis of the emotional distance between husband and wives in dual-earner marriages is a clear example of the consequences of such incipient conflict. Some couples deal with ambivalent gender structure by changing or aligning their actions; others make justifications and give accounts; and some openly rebel. Most dual-earner couples give accounts to help explain their gender "strategies" when their conduct is at odds with their norms. One couple in Hochschild's study portrays this pattern quite creatively by defining the downstairs of their home (which is in reality a garage and playroom) as "half" of their living space, the "half" for which the husband is responsible. Much research suggests that the most typical American couple today professes to believe in gender equality, but the employed wife is still doing a "second shift"—domestic family service.

Neither the individual-level explanations nor those based solely on institutional discrimination can explain continued gender inequality in American families. Right now, the cultural rules and cognitive images explain why actors do gender in ways that support male privilege in family life even when those actors have overcome much internalized oppression and many institutional barriers. The cognitive images to which we must respond during interaction drive continued gender stratification even when individuals desire egalitarian relationships and the law mandates them. Ridgeway (1997) argues that gender stratification is impervious to attempts at social change because sex categorization is an easy solution to the ever-present problem of coordinating human activity. Expectations attached to sex category—accurate or not—provide a cluster of behaviors that we can expect from strangers and that help us to guess how we should behave toward them. Gender is something we do in order to make daily life more manageable. For example, think how hard it would be to share an office with someone whose sex was not obvious to you. The problem, however, is that the differing expec-

tations attached to members of the male and female sex categories are not morally equivalent. Ridgeway argues that they can never be so. Whatever the origins of sexual inequality (and I will not tangle with that question in this book), the expectations of unequal worth are attached to sex category itself. Empirical research (Ridgeway 1997) shows clearly that even in settings in which gender is irrelevant to the task at hand men are presumed to be smarter, more worth listening to, and better leaders. People presumed to be relatively smarter and more worth listening to will have greater impact than others on group decisions—they will become more important. The consequences of gender structure at the interactional level not only reinforce but also re-create inequality even when change might otherwise be possible.

The reconceptualization of gender as a social structure at every level helps us to understand stability and change in contemporary American marriage. Gender rules and cognitive expectations operate as interactional constraints that often create gender hierarchy even among heterosexual feminist couples who bring equivalent external material resources to their relationship. We find that the few heterosexual couples who can repudiate internalized gendered selves and overcome many of the barriers to equality in the workplace still often fail to find equality in marriage. Alternatives are so constrained within our gender structure that even those who consciously reject inequality based on gender may be contributing to the re-creation of gender stratified marriages and to a social structure that disadvantages women. The re-creation of a gender-stratified society is an unintended consequence of institutionally constrained actions—even of those committed to gender equality, and even in a society where laws are at least nominally gender-neutral. Gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels so thoroughly organizes our work, family, and community lives that even those who reject gender inequality in principle sometimes end

up being compelled by the "logic" of gendered situations and cognitive images to choose gendered strategies.[5]

I do not mean to suggest that we do not all own gendered selves, or that institutional sexism has disappeared. Rather, I am simply suggesting that even if we overcame our gendered predispositions and were lucky enough to overcome most of the barriers of institutional sexism, the consequences of gender at the interactional level would still constrain our attempts at social change.

## Feminist Marriage: Conflict among Images, Institutions, and New Selves

Traditional marriage is male dominated. The very terminology used to describe the husband—"the head of the household"—says it clearly. Yet it would be hard to isolate how gender structure *constrains* individuals when individual ideologies, cultural cognitive images, and the institutional force of law are all consistent and interdependent. The consequences of gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels are most easily illustrated when the structure operates in opposition to internalized normative desires. It is currently possible to analyze the effects of gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels despite individual-level opposition to stratification. That is, it is possible to imagine and locate couples committed to gender equality and to analyze how contextual and institutional levels of gender structure affect them. I argue that our gender structure pushes even committed feminists toward a gendered division of labor and toward male-dominated relationships.

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5. Choosing the best of bad alternatives is clearly not a free choice at all. Still, I use the language of choice to remind readers that individual actors wrestle with alternatives and make decisions.

On the cultural level, the consequences of gender structure clearly exist beyond the individuals involved. The normative expectations attached to gender in marriage (one aspect of the "rules") are very strong. Gender remains a "master status" (e.g., Hughes 1945), an organizing principle of marriage; expectations imputed to actors nearly always differ by sex. For example, men are not expected to assume a reflective identity (e.g., to become a Mr. Her) upon marriage. Because a reflective identity is based on association with someone else, it is a subordinate identity. Similarly, routine marital rituals are gender stratified. Bridal showers are based on the assumption that women will shoulder the responsibility for domestic labor. Fathers give away brides to the bridegrooms. Not all couples follow these rituals, of course. But when they do not, they are seen as making a choice that requires explanation. No choice is perceived, no explanations are needed, if rituals are followed. Most young couples, at least those without strong ideological commitments, follow the routine path without considering the unintended consequences: creating yet another stratified marriage.

Marriage is only one institution in which gender stratification is manifested, and it may not even be the most oppressive institution, softened as it can be by warm feelings. Yet marriage is one of the linchpins of inequality in American society. In what other institution are social roles, rights, and responsibilities based—even ideologically—on ascribed characteristics? When life options are tied to racial categories we call it racism at best and apartheid at worst. When life options are tied to gender categories we call it marriage.

The social structure clearly constrains gendered action even as it makes it possible. Wives, even those who have no motivation to provide domestic service to their husbands, are constrained to do so by social expectations. A husband who has a disheveled appearance reflects poorly on his wife's domestic abilities (in real life as well as "ring around the collar" commercials). A wife will be

sanctioned by friends and family for keeping a cluttered and dusty home; a husband will not be. Husbands' behaviors are constrained as well. A husband who is content with a relatively low-wage, low-stress occupation may be pressured (by his wife, among others) to provide more for his family. Few wives, however, are pressured into higher-stress, higher-wage occupations by their families. The expectations we face during ongoing interaction often push us to behave as others want us to (Heiss 1981).

Cultural images within marriage also make gendered action possible. Husbands are not free to work long hours in order to climb the career ladder or increase income unless they are superordinate partners in a system in which wives provide them the "leisure" (i.e., freedom from responsibility for self-care or family care) to do so. Some married women may leave jobs they dislike because the position of domestic wife is open to them. A husband and father unable to keep a job has few other options for gaining self-esteem and identity.

Individuals often act in a structurally patterned fashion, without much thought. Routine is taken for granted even when the action re-creates the inequitable social structure. A woman may choose to change her name upon marriage simply because it seems easier. (Some women may not even know they are making a choice, as name change is so routine in their social circle.) Yet by changing her name a woman implicitly supports and re-creates a reflective definition of wifehood. She does gender. Similarly, when a woman assents to her children carrying her husband's surname (even when she herself has retained her own), she is re-creating a patrilineal system by which family identity is traced primarily through the male line. In both these examples a couple's intention may be to create a nuclear family identity and to avoid the awkwardness of hyphenated names for children. Whatever the intention, the structure has constrained the possible choices available to them. Their purpo-

sive actions may provide them with both the desired consequences (one family name) *and* the unintended consequence of re-creating a gender structure based on reflective female identity and patrilineal family names.

Let us now turn to a more concrete illustration of my thesis: how gender as a structure at the interactional level, in combination with the existence of gendered work institutions, can create inequality despite the motivations of the actors. To illustrate this hypothesis I will weave a story about a young feminist couple who marry while both are pursuing graduate degrees.[6] Although this story is fictional, I have taken every aspect from real people's lives — my own graduate students' struggles, stories from colleagues and their spouses, my own family members and friends, and my own experiences.

The graduate students in my story marry. The couple retain their own names and explicitly agree to pursue a fully egalitarian relationship. The husband's family immediately question the relationship because the wife will not even embrace their name. And the husband himself cannot help but notice that some of his colleagues have more time to study because their wives are temporarily supporting them rather than pursuing their own careers. Some of his friends' wives even type papers, and most prepare meals regularly.

How are these events the consequences of gender structure? They are structural constraints in that the cultural expectations for behaviors are attached to the sex category itself. Gendered expectations are cultural objects to which others must respond. No husband is expected to change his name, and few are expected

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6. This example is clearly race and class specific. Only a white, middle-class woman would face these particular gender structures. I believe that a multilevel theory of gender will help explain any social context, but I chose the one that I know best in order to illustrate my argument.

to regularly prepare meals for the family. In addition, each partner draws comparisons with similarly situated others. The husband compares himself with other young husbands. What are the experiences of the men with whom he socializes? How available are more service-oriented wives? He compares himself with other men in a male-dominated society. The wife compares herself with other young wives. How egalitarian are their husbands? She may, in fact, notice that there seems to be a shortage of males interested in divesting themselves of male privilege. If they are in a social network with some other egalitarian couples, however, the comparisons will in fact enable their choices. The sociological ambivalence will allow them to negotiate a more feminist lifestyle.

The gender stratification crisis in egalitarian couples can usually be traced to the assigning of parental duties. What happens to an avidly feminist middle-class couple motivated to share these duties equally? At the birth of the first child the male is quickly constrained to be a "good provider." He is considered solely responsible for the economic well-being of this fragile new person. No matter how involved a new father becomes in child care he almost never considers less than full-time employment (Gerson 1993). Feminist men share child care duties before and after paid work. In fact, men are expected to work harder and are constrained from leaving less than optimal jobs because of their economic responsibilities. When they do care for their children after work they are praised highly by friends, family members, and wives as wonderful, modern, "involved" fathers. A married professional woman faces a quite different set of reactions at the birth of the first child. Her domestic women friends and perhaps even her own family members may suggest that she is a selfish feminist who puts herself before her own child's welfare. If the child is clingy, friends may suggest that the child doesn't get to see the mother very much (even though the child sees her just as often as she or he sees the wonderful father

these friends rave about). If the child is independent they suggest that this trait comes from having to fend for herself or himself too often and too soon. Although the wife provides at least as much care as her husband, he is praised and she is damned. The couple themselves begin to think of him as a terrific father and of her as a reasonable if somewhat selfish mother. His self-esteem is high, and she feels lucky to have such a husband, given the alternatives. The culturally defined cognitive images and the gendered rules are taking their toll.

Then the second child is born. The scarcity of high-quality infant care forces the parents to spend an extra hour daily commuting to two different child-care providers. Both parents feel tired and pressured. The husband never considers working part-time because the "good provider" expectation does not allow it. In fact, he knows how much his advancement has been hindered by his need to leave the office every day at 5:30 sharp to dash to the day-care center before it closes. He understands that he is fast falling behind his male colleagues in more traditional families. At the same time, his wife compares herself with both employed and stay-at-home mothers. She sees the emotional costs of maintaining a two-career family. This young mother does not compare herself with the ambitious men in her husband's office who work ten-hour days. Rather, she compares herself with the other women in the social welfare agency in which she works and with women who do not work for pay at all. Perhaps she finds less satisfaction and fewer material rewards in the workplace than she had hoped for during her graduate training. Like most women, she works in a sex-segregated environment in which she and her colleagues are undervalued and underpaid. Most of her colleagues also struggle to balance family and economic responsibilities. She decides that despite the financial hardship, part-time employment will give her the best of both worlds. She may even be surprised at the personal satisfaction that

parenting has provided her, and, unlike her husband, she is not glued to her occupation by the breadwinner expectations. In fact, if she can arrange to work when her husband is home, the savings in day-care costs may result in an only marginal decrease in family income. She feels lucky; she will retain her professional identity and skills while slowing the hectic pace of their lives. Her husband is pleased to have the freedom to commit himself to career mobility. Her purposive action, chosen after much deliberation, will provide the desired consequences.

The powerful effects of both the institutional and the interactional aspects of the gender structure become more apparent as the story continues. The institutional components of the gender structure include a sex-segregated labor force, a wage gap, the lack of available, accessible, excellent infant care, and full-time employment usually defined as forty or more uninterrupted hours per week. Social institutions continue to operate as if workers have domestic wives, disadvantaging men and women who do not. The cultural images or gender rules also are constraining: the breadwinner image only to him, and the domestic wife image only to her.

Thompson's (1991) application of distributive justice theory to family studies explains why a self-consciously feminist woman will not necessarily perceive any inequity as her marriage falls into a traditional pattern. Gender has so structured her perceptions that her reference group is single-sex. She may not "have it all," but compared with other women (historically and in her circle), she has more. Lennon and Rosenfeld (1994) show empirically that only when women have real economic alternatives to marriage do they even begin to define their double burden or limited choices as unfair.

The combination of gendered institutions and cognitive images based on gender rules lead this feminist couple to discover a gendered strategy: part-time employment for the woman. But the un-

intended consequence of this action will have a profound impact on their marriage. And the unintended consequence of this alternative (from the structurally available options) by many women is to support and re-create gender stratification in both marital and economic institutions. The negotiated order has fallen under the constraints of gender structure. This woman has become an economic dependent, and as a partner in the marital exchange she is at a disadvantage. They may be equals in the exchange of companionship, love, and sexual fulfillment, but he has now become the primary source of economic support. The longer she remains outside the full-time labor force the less capable she will be of supporting herself and her children. The longer she works part-time, the more financially dependent she becomes.

The unintended consequences of "choosing" this path go far beyond the dynamics of the marital relationships of women who are employed part-time. Like domestic wives, these women provide the hidden labor that supports an economic system that continues to operate as if workers are disembodied people with no family responsibilities. The firm where her husband works can expect ambitious employees to work long hours only if there are enough workers with wives who will provide domestic service. And because some women provide hidden labor, those workers who have children but do not have domestic wives will find it hard to compete with men in traditional marriages. Indeed, those who rise to the top, the professional and elite gatekeepers, are usually childless individuals or men with wives at home. Thus, people with caretaking responsibilities are unlikely to reach such levels of power or influence (see Hunt and Hunt 1977).

The issue of part-time employment for women is perhaps the best illustration of the tenacity of our stratified gender structure. And it is no trivial issue. Analysis of current national data (Hayghe and Bianchi 1994) shows that in 1992 only 36.8 percent of married

mothers worked full-time, full-year for pay. About an equal number (36.1 percent) work in the labor force part-time or part of the year, and the rest (27.1 percent) depend solely on their husband's economic support. Although the high percentage of employed women has garnered much attention, only a minority of married women work full-time. And many professionally successful women either choose to remain childless or to devote themselves to careers only after their children are gone. Employers continue to assume that the most successful and ambitious workers will have wives or do not need them. And the empirical reality is still that most men do not have major nurturing responsibilities, either for children or for the aged. The presumption that the "best" employee must be willing to work long, inflexible hours has left many families with only bad choices. The irony is that when married couples choose (that is, take the least unattractive option) for the wife to work part-time, they are re-creating gender stratification in their own marriage and in the economic sector. Part-time employment for married women —often the least unattractive of available options—may provide just enough illusion of gender equality to allow the institutional structural inequities to remain entrenched.

## Summary

I have argued that gender is a social structure. It organizes our entire world. At the individual level we learn who we are and want to be within a world where boys and girls are treated almost as though they were different kinds of creatures. At the interactional level our expectations for others' behaviors are filtered through a gender lens (Howard et al. 1996). The cultural rules and cognitive images that give shape and substance to our daily lives—especially those rules and images that surround our most intimate relationships—are profoundly attached to our biological sex. As the twentieth century closes, much of the formal, legalized, institutional sex

discrimination has been eliminated, at least in Western societies. But the formal institutions to which we must all adapt—our work-places, in particular—were built on assumptions both of gender difference and sexual inequality. Industrial capitalism could never have been organized as it now exists unless there was an implicit belief that paid workers were not, or should not be, responsible for the weak, the infirm, the aged, or the young.

The gender structure so pervades our lives that we often do not even see it. We fail to recognize that these differential expectations for men and women, for husbands and wives, are how sexual difference is transformed into gender stratification. I have argued that our gender structure at the interactional level is at the core of the male privilege still obvious in marriage and the family and that the structure of our interactional encounters re-creates gender stratification even when the people involved are committed to equality.

But does this theoretical perspective mean that we are doomed forever to re-create gender inequality? In the next three chapters I hope to convince the reader that gender is a social structure that we can get beyond. Gender need not organize our family systems, even if it always has done so.