What's the "Sociology" in the Sociology of Gender?

Understanding Sociology and Gender

Why Do You Need Theory to Understand Gender?

Students hear the word *theory*, even as it relates to something as interesting as the study of gender, and have one of several possible reactions. They may become nervous and uneasy at the prospect of trying to grasp seemingly unreachable, complex concepts. They may roll their eyes and sigh loudly while muttering, "What does theory matter to me?" A few students may anticipate with great enthusiasm the intellectual endeavor that learning to understand and apply theory involves. But I suspect those students may be in the minority, and their eagerness may cause more eye rolling and sighing on the part of some of their classmates. Given the difficulty of learning theory and the anxiety it may cause, why is it important to understand theories about gender?

Learning and understanding gender theories becomes a little less scary when you realize that everyone already has some working theory about gender and the way it operates in the world. From the first moment someone said to you as a small child, "That's what girls do and not what boys do," you probably began to develop your own explanation for why that was so. As we get older, our theories about how gender works become more sophisticated. They may be grounded in a sense that we act in gendered ways because of our biology or because that's what everyone around us seems to expect. We may have a working explanation of gender for certain situations (family life and intimate relationships) and a different set of explanations for other contexts (work and school life).

As you learn the theoretical approaches various people have developed in relation to gender, there's a strong possibility that some of them will sound familiar and that others will make less sense to you. This is likely because some theories match more or less closely the working theory you've already developed about how gender works. Regardless of the specific content of your own theories about gender, we all have a general sense of what gender is and how it works, and at a basic level, this is what a theory is—a set of statements and propositions that seek to explain or predict a particular aspect of social life (Newman, 2016).

Three Reasons to Learn Gender Theories

If we all already have our own theories about gender, then why is it important to learn theories that have been developed by other people? Why aren't our own personal theories good enough? There are three answers to that question. *One answer* is that although we all have our own theories about gender, we may have never had the opportunity or inclination to test those theories in a meaningful and rigorous way. You can test your individual theory of gender against your own experiences, but as we've already discussed in Chapter 1, your own experiences are likely to be very different from those of people in other parts of the world and with other identities. For example, your theory may work well at explaining why a wife in a heterosexual married couple does much of the housework, but can it help explain the division of household labor between married gay, lesbian, or transgender couples? Your theory may work for some situations in your own life but not for others.

Most of the theories we discuss in the next two chapters have been proposed by people who've had the time, opportunity, and inclination to develop their theories and to test their usefulness in a variety of ways, including conducting social research. Ideally, that research tests these theories in a variety of settings and situations, making the explanatory power of the theory that much greater. Throughout the book, you'll see these theories applied to specific situations to explain a wide variety of behaviors.

A second reason theory is important is that it helps us to test the explanatory "wings," so to speak, of our own way of understanding gender. You may have strong beliefs about your own particular theory of gender. But your ability to defend that belief depends on your being able to demonstrate why your beliefs are right and others are wrong. Learning theory forces you to seriously consider the strengths and weaknesses of your own way of thinking. This happens through gaining a thorough and workable understanding of how other theories work. Why? Because to demonstrate that another theory is wrong, you have to have a pretty good understanding of what it says and how it works. You may read about doing gender in this chapter and not at all agree with the way in which doing-gender theorists understand gender. But developing your own explanation for why doing-gender theory is wrong requires that you further develop your own way of understanding gender in response to those ideas. In other words, it's not enough to simply say someone else's explanation of gender inequality is wrong; you must be able first to demonstrate *how* they're wrong and then to demonstrate how *your* explanation is better. If you think of your own way of understanding gender as a set of wings you've constructed for yourself to navigate through life, learning other theories about gender is like putting those wings through a series of test flights to see whether they really work.

The final reason it's important to learn theories about gender has to do with our own ability to see and understand the world accurately. Can we trust our vision of the world? Is what we see true or real, and what does it mean to say something is *real*, anyway? Do the beliefs we may already have about gender influence what

we see and feel? For example, psychologists identify **confirmation bias** as our tendency to look for information that confirms our preexisting beliefs while ignoring information that contradicts those beliefs. If you believe gay men act more feminine, confirmation bias predicts that you will pay special attention to all the gay men you know or see who act more feminine while ignoring both the gay men who *don't* act feminine and the nongay men who *do* act feminine. Confirmation bias suggests that our own working theories of gender can serve as blinders, preventing us from seeing and considering certain gendered phenomena in our lives.

Learning about other theories is a way to remove those blinders through focusing our attention on aspects of gender that we might not otherwise have seen or noticed. Along these lines, many sociologists speak of using theory as a kind of lens through which to see the world. Like binoculars, magnifying lenses, microscopes, telescopes, and 3-D glasses, these different lenses provide us with different views of the world.

All three of these reasons suggest that learning theories of gender is important because these theories help us to become better thinkers in general—and especially better thinkers as related to issues of gender in our lives. So let's begin our exploration of theories of gender by looking at feminism and its influence on sociological ways of thinking about gender.

Gender in Sociology Before Feminism

Sociology, like many of the traditional academic disciplines, is perceived as being founded primarily by white, upper-class, European, presumably heterosexual men. Early sociologists, such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, are credited with developing the foundations of sociological theory as a response to the problems they perceived in their own lifetimes—problems such as industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of capitalism. But as feminists would later point out, their view of the world was inevitably shaped by their own positions as white, largely upper-class, heterosexual, European cis men. These men assumed that they were describing experiences and concepts that applied to everyone, regardless of their gender, race, class position, or sexuality; but as we will continue to discover in this book, there are problems with assuming any kind of universal experience.

Women and people of color were doing sociology alongside Weber and Durkheim, but not surprisingly given the long history of sexism and racism, their contributions were largely erased from the discipline. Max Weber's wife, Marianne Weber, was an important feminist, intellectual, and sociologist in her own right, publishing works on gender, motherhood, and marriage (Appelrouth & Edles, 2012). Jane Addams won the Noble Peace Prize for her work with poor, immigrant communities in Chicago and published many books describing her detailed research into the causes and consequences of poverty in American cities. W. E. B. DuBois, in addition to being the first Black man to earn a graduate degree from Harvard, also developed extensive theories of racial inequality and is believed to

have influenced Weber's theory of status, but only recently have some sociologists included him as one of the central founders of the discipline. Though early women sociologists like Jane Addams and Marianne Weber were including gender in their theories, their contributions were ignored and written out of the history of sociology, mostly because of their supposedly inferior status as women. The thoughts and ideas of white men were simply seen as more important and valid than those of women and people of color.

The way in which the theories of Max Weber are still remembered but his wife Marianne's are largely forgotten brings us to a consideration of how power and privilege work in society. The white, male founders were in a privileged position because of their race and their status as men. **Privilege** is a set of mostly unearned rewards and benefits that come with a given status in society. Writer Roxane Gay (2014) calls privilege a sort of peculiar benefit. As a Black, queer woman and a child of Haitian parents, Gay describes how even though she may lack certain benefits in the United States, she enjoyed many privileges relative to children in Haiti. Everyone has some privilege, and everyone lacks some privilege. The privilege W. E. B. DuBois may have had as a man was balanced against the lack of privilege he had as a Black man. Privilege, Gay and others tell us, is a complicated thing.

Privilege can take the form of actual rewards, such as the privilege of knowing that as a man, you can generally make much more than most women as a professional athlete or coach. Jill Ellis, coach of the 3-time champion United States Women's National Soccer team, made $318,533 in 2018 compared to her male equivalent, Bruce Arena, who made $1.4 million during the same period even though his men's team failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup (Mertens 2019). The WNBA's (Women's National Basketball Association) most valuable player in 2016, Sylvia Fowles, earned $109,000 for all her accomplishments. In the men's NBA (National Basketball Association), Leandro Barbosa was waived by the Phoenix Suns in 2017 and was still expected to make $500,000, 5 times as much as Fowles, even though he wouldn't be playing most of the season. In golf, the U.S. Women's Open in 2015 set a record for attendance as spectators watched Gee Chun win. Chun received $810,000 as an award from the U.S. Golf Association, while Jordan Spieth, the winner of the men's Open, got $1.8 million. In most sports, men have the privilege of being able to make more than women.

Privilege is trickier to identify when it signifies the absence of barriers that exist for less privileged people. If two white, upper-class women were to sit at a table at Starbucks without ordering anything, chances are that no one would call the police to have them removed. Yet when two Black men in Philadelphia did the same thing as they waited for a business meeting, the police were called and the two men were arrested (Pomrenze & Simon, 2018). Being able to appear in public

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Are there still ways in your society in which men's experiences are assumed to be universal? Can you think of any specific examples of this tendency? How would our thinking be different if we assumed women's experiences were universal? For example, what if giving birth to children was assumed to be a basic, universal experience?

places without having the police called to arrest you is an example of a barrier that is not faced by those in a privileged status to the same degree as it is by less privileged people in society. This kind of privilege has been described as functioning like the wind at your back if you're peddling a bicycle (Wimsatt, 2001). Privilege, like the wind, makes moving through the world that much easier, and you might assume you're moving so quickly because of your own effort—your pedaling. You probably won't realize how helpful the wind at your back was until you find yourself having to bike *into* the wind. It's difficult to realize what that's like until you've had to do it yourself—or maybe until you've talked to someone else who has had to do it.

Where does that leave us with the men in the field of sociology and their lack of concern about gender? Being mostly white, upper-class men allowed these sociologists to bike with the wind, and as far as they knew, everyone else was doing the same thing. Gender didn't seem important to them in part because its effect on their lives, although still important, was also less visible. This is, in fact, another form of privilege. Part of the benefit of being in a privileged status is that you don't have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. Theorists like DuBois and Addams wrote about gender and race because they didn't have the privilege of ignoring its impact on their lives. Do people who live in places with reliable access to electricity and clean water think about how lucky they are to be living in a place with those benefits? Do people in the United States consider how convenient it is that people around the world know much more about American culture than the average American knows about other cultures? Probably not. Being American or from a place where these things are taken for granted is a privilege, and most people don't spend large chunks of their days thinking about the privileges they *have*.

White, straight, male sociologists were privileged by their gender, and that meant they didn't have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. This is one small part of the reason why those male sociologists did not seriously consider gender (or race or sexuality) and an important lesson in the blinding properties of privilege. Privilege, in fact, is one of the reasons we need to be cautious in trusting the reality and objectivity of our own views about gender, and it is therefore another reason learning gender theories can be useful.

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What are other examples of statuses that come with privilege? Can you think of specific barriers that don't exist for people with those privileges? How does having privilege affect the way you see and understand the world?

Feminist Theories and Their Influence on Sociological Thinking About Gender

Across history, cultures, and civilizations, when women have asserted their power and asked for equality, it has almost always been perceived as dangerous. It is important to remember that the various versions of feminism we discuss are just

one manifestation of a long, global history of questioning the gender status quo and advocating the rights of women. Women in Kenya organized to fight the effects of colonial governments on their livelihood in 1948, and women in India were involved in working for their own rights along with their country's independence long before it was achieved in 1947 (Basu, 1995). Neither of these groups of women would have described themselves as feminists, though. Feminism in all its many forms assumes certain models of what it means to be a woman, what the goals of women should be relative to their status, and how to go about achieving those goals. But the feminist model, although it continues to expand and adapt to fit the diverse needs of women and men across the world, is, like sociology, a product of Anglo-European thought.

Globally, women define their own interests and goals differently, and they sometimes perceive feminism as another attempt by the global North to make the rest of the world into their own image (Basu, 1995). Given this history, we should remember that those particular ideologies we label as feminism do not describe the totality of how women think about or organize in their own interests globally, as we explore throughout this book. For now, because we're focusing on the relationship between feminism and sociological thought, we'll be talking about feminism and women's movements as they developed mainly in the Anglo-European world.

In the 21st century, calling yourself a feminist is less stigmatized than it was in the past, as pop icons like Beyoncé and Taylor Swift now label themselves feminists. A 2016 poll found that 6 in 10 women and one third of men identified themselves as feminists or strong feminist. Among women ages 18 to 34, 63% identified as strong feminist or feminist. These numbers suggest that feminism is increasingly popular among younger generations. But negative stereotypes about feminism persist. In the same poll, 46% of people believed feminism blames men for women's challenges (Cai & Clement, 2016).

Regardless of attitudes toward the label, feminism is integral to any discussion of gender and especially to a sociological exploration of gender. So what exactly is feminism, and why is it seen as so dangerous around the world?

The First Wave of the Feminist Movement

Feminists generally divide their discussion of feminism as a social movement into three periods, though it's important to keep in mind that the reality on the ground is much more complicated. Women active during the first wave lived long enough to be part of the second wave as well. The lines we draw between one wave and the next can be arbitrary but are helpful as a framework for understanding feminism historically.

The first wave of feminism coincided with suffrage movements in both Europe and the United States (Taylor, Whittier, & Pelak, 2004). This is different from the history of women's movements in most of the global South simply because nearly all the men and women in these nations were deprived of the right to vote or govern themselves by colonial powers. Women's suffrage, when it came, was

often connected to suffrage for native peoples more generally. This first phase in the women's movement in the Anglo-European world is specific to the historical context of existing democracies in which male (and, in the United States, *white* male) citizens had long ago achieved the right to vote.

The early suffragettes were a diverse group in both their backgrounds and their goals, but many of their efforts focused primarily on enfranchisement, or getting women the right to vote. For some women in the movement, this was because they wished to pursue social reform goals that were not necessarily connected to gender, such as the legal prohibition of alcohol. These women saw getting the vote as the first step in this larger project. Other women of the first wave had more radical goals, including sexual freedom and expanding the roles of middle-class women in the workplace.

Gaining an expanded role for women in the workforce was an important goal for white, middle-class women, who largely did *not* do paid work outside the home. Suffragettes such as Sojourner Truth, a former slave who served as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, drew attention to the differing experiences among women of the first wave. As a former slave, Sojourner Truth never had the luxury of *not* working, and the kind of work she did was considered "men's work" by many of the white suffragettes—although she was certainly never paid for it. As would be the case throughout the history of the feminist movement, the way women were positioned in society often led to a different outlook on what the main problems faced by women in society were and how to go about fixing those problems. Regardless of these differences, the first-wave movement was successful in gaining the right to vote for women in 1920 in the United States (and in 1928 in England, but not until 1944 in France).

The Second Wave of the Feminist Movement

When most people in the 21st century think of feminism, their frame of reference is the second wave of the feminist movement that began in the 1960s in the global North. This movement was part of a larger, global social movement cycle that included independence movements in the developing world as well as the civil rights movement in the United States. There were many interconnections among these different movements. For example, some women who got their initial social movement experience within the civil rights movement in the United States moved on to the women's movement. In the developing world, women worked within nationalist movements to throw off colonial rule and establish democracies. Although they often included women's rights within those larger agendas, these movements were necessarily different because of the historical context of the post-colonial world.

The second wave of feminism, like the first wave, was characterized by diversity in the types of women involved and in the articulation of their goals. To understand this second wave of feminism is to understand that, as with all social movements, there was no one movement, no one group, and often no

single, unanimously agreed upon agenda. Organizations such as NOW (the National Organization for Women) focused on passing legislation in the United States that would have institutionalized the prevention of gender discrimination. One way they tried to accomplish this goal was through passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

Consciousness-raising also became an important part of the movement as feminists focused on finding connections between their personal lives and the politics of gender. For many feminists, the development of their theories of gender were inextricably grounded in an examination of their personal lives, and this work was just as important, if not more important, than changing institutions such as the government. Charlotte Bunch epitomized this connection when she wrote in 1968, "There is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and no political issue that is not ultimately personal. The old barriers have fallen" (Bordo, 2003). From these examinations of the connections between the personal and the political came a focus on issues such as women's rights in the workplace (including the right to be free from sexual harassment), domestic violence, reproductive rights, and sexual violence.

The Third Wave of the Feminist Movement

Third-wave feminism was in many ways a response to the contradictions of second-wave feminism. Emerging during the 1980s and 1990s, third-wave feminism encompassed a diverse range of theories and orientations among both academics and activists. The voices of women of color, who were a strong influence in all three waves of the feminist movement, were strongest in the development of third-wave feminism. Women such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Aurora Levins Morales, and Rebecca Walker questioned essentialist tendencies in feminism, or the tendency to assume some universal experience of being a woman. They fought to organize around issues of race, sexual orientation, and social class in addition to gender.

In her collection of third-wave essays, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, Rebecca Walker (1995) attempted to articulate a way to be feminist that offered room enough to include both men and women; whites and people of color; lesbians, gays, and straight people; supermodels like Veronica Webb; and second-wave feminists such as Gloria Steinem. Third-wave feminism was influenced by postmodernism, postcolonialism, the work of Michel Foucault, and, eventually, queer theory.

The third wave is characterized in many ways by coming to terms with and being up front about the many contradictions that always lay beneath the surface of feminism as it developed. For example, postcolonialism influenced feminism in the third wave by drawing attention to the ways in which women had ignored the experiences of women outside the Anglo-European world. This examination raised questions about whether women could claim one global movement or whether the

interests and goals of women in the global North and global South were so different and opposed as to make any umbrella movement impossible. Third-wave feminism, rather than ignoring or suppressing these types of questions, embraced them as crucial to the next phase of achieving gender equality.

The Fourth Wave of the Feminist Movement

Are we currently living in a fourth wave of the feminist movement? If we are, what's the difference between this latest feminist movement and those of the past? Scholars have been heralding a fourth wave since as far back as 1986. But more recently a series of events and activism have converged into a critical mass of activism. The Women's March in 2016 on the day after Donald Trump's inauguration became the largest single-day protest in U.S. history. Estimates suggest that between 3 and 5 million people participated in all sister marches across the United States that day and that a total of 7 million people marched worldwide in 81 other countries (Hortocollis & Alcindor, 2017; Women's March, 2016). In the 2018 midterm elections in the United States, a record-setting number of women ran for political office (and won). Also in 2018, the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment of women in the workplace swept across social media. That use of the hashtag was not the first iteration of the movement, which was first used by Black activist Tarana Burke (Olheiser, 2017). The hashtag, along with the cascade of women going public with their stories of harassment by famous and powerful men ranging from Harvey Weinstein to Garrison Keillor to Al Franken, resulted in the formation of Time's Up, an organization to systematically combat sexual harassment (Gonzalez, France, & Melas, 2018). All of these events suggest we're living in the middle of a fourth wave.

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What evidence do you see for a fourth wave of feminism in your own life or online? What seem to be the goals of this social movement? Who are the people involved in the fourth wave?

In attempting to characterize this fourth wave, Feministing blog founder Jessica Valenti said in 2009 that perhaps one of its defining qualities was that it was online (Grady, 2018). As with other 21st-century social movements like the Arab Spring, fourth-wave feminists meet and plan their activism online. The #MeToo movement began as a hashtag on Twitter. Much of the organizing that went into the Women's March took place online as well. For that reason, some have dated the beginning of the fourth wave to 2008, when social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were firmly entrenched in society and popular feminist blogs like Jezebel and Feministing spread across the web. As with other waves of feminism, the fourth wave is diverse and often contradictory. Still, in addition to being digitally driven, fourth-wave feminism is characterized by its queerness, its trans inclusiveness, and its body positivity (Grady, 2018).

He for She: Men and Feminism

At this point you might ask yourself, *Where do men fit into all of this?* Are conversations about feminism compatible with conversations about men, and if so, how? You might be concerned, given the considerable amount of time we've just spent talking about feminism and the assumptions many people have about feminism (that feminists are angry or hate men), that this book is going to be all about how much men suck.

Let's start with the first question: Where were men during these various waves of the feminist movement? The answer is complicated. Some men *were* involved in various places and times in women's movements. In the first-wave feminist movement in the United States, men such as abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Henry Ward Beecher (father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) were involved in working for women's suffrage along with the abolition of slavery. Many 19th-century activists saw these issues as deeply connected, although the two issues also sometimes led to divisions within the movement. The National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) emerged with the second wave of the women's movement in the 1970s and focuses on issues such as child custody and ending men's violence (NOMAS, n.d.). Globally, men and women have often worked side by side in movements for national liberation and establishing democracy. In Kenya, women fought alongside men in the Mau war of 1952 for Kenya's independence from colonial control. In the most recent fourth wave, many men have come forward to claim the feminist label, and the United Nations is actively engaged in a campaign to involve men in the quest for gender equality, a movement labeled He for She. Women involved in social movements often argue that the accomplishment of their goals would benefit both men and women in society, as we will see later. Although this may be true, most people involved in women's movements are often still women.

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What are some concrete ways in which feminism could benefit men?

Are conversations about feminism compatible with conversations about men? The answer to this second question is a definite yes. As mentioned, feminists argue in various forms that a society with more gender equality is a society that's good for everyone, women and men. Although in the United States the second wave of the feminist movement was often referred to as *women's liberation*, many women felt that the movement would liberate men as well. What did men need to be liberated from? As we will see throughout this book, although gender as a social system often privileges men, it does not *always* do so, and when it does provide privileges, they often come with a price. Our culture demands that both men and women conform to gender and sexual norms, and men's access to power and privilege is conditional on their conformity to these norms. Part of the goal of feminists is to loosen these restrictions for everyone.

Feminists have always been subject to accusations of disliking men. But as you should begin to see, feminism is not about positioning men against women in some kind of epic battle for power and control of the universe, although that might make

for an interesting video game. As feminism has evolved over time, questions about how to involve men and how feminism matters for men have become increasingly important. As we will see in our discussion of sociological theory that follows, sociologists are especially concerned with studying gender as it applies to men and women, and masculinity is a central topic for gender research. Because gender is a system that is always relational (you can't have a category called "women" without a category called "men"), a comprehensive understanding of gender must examine both men and women. So, no, this book will not be about how much men suck but about how both women and men are part of the social system called gender.

Sociological Theories of Gender

The most important contribution of feminism to sociology as a discipline was to place topics such as gender and sexuality on the agenda of sociologists and to encourage a critical reflection on the place of gender within the larger discipline. This change was signaled in part during the 1970s when academic journals within sociology began publishing issues that focused on gender or featured the works of feminist scholars (Hamilton, 2007). This was the first step toward developing theories that sought to explain gender from a specifically sociological perspective.

Gender and the Sociological Imagination

So what exactly is this sociological approach to gender? To answer this question, we need to develop a basic understanding of what sociology is as a discipline. C. Wright Mills famously said that sociology lies at the intersection of history and biography. He wrote this in his essay on the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959/2000), and the sociological imagination is a good place to start a brief overview of what makes up a sociological perspective.

What did Mills mean by the intersection of biography and history? Well, we've already talked some about biography. You come to the topic of gender with an intensely gendered biography. Gender is a part of your biography, and the first contribution sociology makes is to help you act like an archaeologist in the rich and fascinating material of your own life, carefully unearthing the impact of gender. Archaeology is a good metaphor to use for this process because it requires a careful method and precision. A backhoe won't work—but think of the typical method of archaeologists, sifting through the debris of an archaeological site, carefully cataloging each minute piece. Sociology seeks to give you the analytical and theoretical tools to turn that kind of detailed examination onto your own life. Although it's usually interesting to think and talk about ourselves, it can also be unnerving; as in archaeology, you never know what you might uncover.

Understanding your own personal biography isn't necessarily the easy part for Mills, but it's certainly more accessible to us than the second part: history. In his essay on the sociological imagination, Mills (1959/2000) worried about people's

ability to understand fully the forces acting on them historically as individuals. He explained this concern by making a division between private troubles and public issues. **Private troubles** are those problems we face that have to do with ourselves and our immediate surroundings, or what Mills called our "milieux" (p. 11). Private troubles are solvable within ourselves individually or within a limited range of the people around us.

Public issues exist beyond the individual or her own immediate milieu, and they are located within the larger structures of our societies—such as social institutions. Public issues are the history part of the intersection between biography and history. Understanding public issues requires taking a difficult step back and looking at the big picture of society, asking ourselves what kind of social forces are working on us that are beyond our control. Like the archaeology described earlier, this can be difficult because it involves seeing the ways in which we are sometimes subject to larger social forces. Understanding that our free will is somewhat limited is not an easy thing for many of us to reconcile; it diminishes the sense that our choices are ours and ours alone to make.

To understand the world around us, we have to understand where our private troubles leave off and public issues begin; this is the core of what Mills was pointing to in his discussion of the sociological imagination. It doesn't help that in societies like the United States, with a strong emphasis on individualism, we are more likely to attribute our problems to private troubles. This tendency to explain behavior by invoking personal dispositions while ignoring the roles of social structure and context (public issues) is called the **fundamental attribution error** (Aries, 1996). The sociological imagination as outlined by Mills (1959/2000) seeks to correct this tendency, and although feminists use a different language, this is part of their agenda as well. For too long, many of the problems faced by women had been perceived as merely private troubles. Feminists demanded that these problems begin to be treated as public issues, or as connected to larger social forces and therefore beyond the control of just one woman or man. From a sociological perspective, using the **sociological imagination** to investigate gender means performing the detailed archaeology of our own biography and learning to identify the larger structural forces at work in our lives surrounding issues of gender.

All the theories we discuss serve as tools to help in building your sociological imagination, or in learning to see the connection between your own life and larger social structures. There are several questions to ask yourself and to think about that will help you as you read through these theories. The first question is this: *How do these theories define gender?* As we discussed in Chapter 1, there is not complete agreement on exactly how to define gender or sex, or on how the two are related to each other. Some theories adhere to the idea of sexual dimorphism—that there are two types of bodies, male and female. Others largely ignore the question of sexual

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One way to think about public issues is to ask how you might think about and experience gender differently if you lived in a different historical period. If you lived 50 years ago, how would your experience of gender be different? How about 100 years ago?

dimorphism or suggest that biological sex is largely unimportant to a consideration of gender. Although theorists usually do not provide an explicit definition of gender, their theories often imply a certain way of understanding what gender is. Think about what the implied definition of gender is in each of these theories.

This first question is related to the second: *Where does the theory locate gender?* Is gender something that exists inside a person, or is it something that's created through interaction? Is gender inside our heads, or is it something deeply embedded in the major institutions of our society? This question has become increasingly important in the sociological study of gender, because theories are often divided into three categories: individual, interactionist, and institutional. Theories using the **individual approach** locate gender inside individuals in some form or another. Some individual theories might see these internal traits as related to sex and therefore biology. Other theories of socialization emphasize that gender becomes internalized over time as we learn gender. From either approach, an individualist theory understands gender as something located inside the individual, and its influence is realized from the inside out through our individual actions and behaviors.

Interactionist approaches locate gender metaphorically in the space between people. Rather than something that resides inside a person, gender is something that is created primarily in the interaction between people. In many interactionist theories, gender therefore does not exist as an internal trait or disposition but only as a phenomenon created in our interactions with other people.

Finally, **institutional approaches** draw attention to the way in which large-scale organizations and institutions in society help to create and reinforce gender. Like radical feminism, these theories emphasize the way in which gender is woven into all the structures of society. When we are plugged into those institutions and structures, the slots we fill are already gendered. Gender is created by the working of these social structures.

The third question to think about for these theories and any theory of gender is the following: *How does the theory explain the connection between gender and inequality?* Does the theory address issues of inequality, and what is its explanation for why this inequality exists? How is the explanation of inequality rooted in the way the theory defines and locates gender? This question asks us to think about the real-world implications of different theoretical approaches. When you thoroughly explore the implications of the theory, does it still make sense and does the theory still work? Can you think of a situation in which the theory just doesn't seem to work? Exploring a theory's implications also means thinking through its practical applications.

This is especially relevant for how the theory explains gender inequality. If you follow the assumptions of the theory, what would be the most important step in reducing gender inequality? For example, we saw that radical feminism defines gender as deeply embedded in the workings of society. Given this way of thinking about gender, the implication of radical feminism for practical action is that you must make radical transformations to society to reduce gender inequality. As you read through these theories, think about what practical action they imply.

Sex Roles

Sex role theory is our first example of an individual approach to gender. We've already discussed the important distinctions between the terms *gender* and *sex*, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that early works exploring the role of gender in sociology most commonly used the term *sex roles*. The idea of a sex role begins with the idea of a social role more generally. A **social role** is a set of expectations that are attached to a particular status or position in society. Statuses can be general, like man or woman, white or Black, and gay or straight. Or they can be more specific, such as professor of sociology, sophomore biology major, president of the science fiction club, or father of three children.

Different expectations go along with these different statuses. For example, we might expect a first-year sociology major to come to class hungover, but we would not expect that of the professor of sociology; it wouldn't be unusual for the president of the science fiction and fantasy club to spend 30 hours a week playing Dungeons and Dragons, but we probably wouldn't expect that from a father and husband with a full-time job (unless maybe he was playing with his children).

A **sex role**, then, is the set of expectations attached to your particular sex category. What are the expectations that people in society have for you based on your status as a woman or a man? An easy way to uncover these expectations is to think about what kinds of behaviors you might get in trouble for engaging in or thoughts that might seem strange to have as a man or woman in your society. For example, in American society, it might be strange to see an adult man cry, but in popular Bollywood movies produced in India, it's an expectation that the male heroes cry. The best male actors are those best at shedding some tears. Social roles vary by society, but most cultures impose some set of expectations on individuals based on their assignment into a sex category. Violations of a role are a good way to tease out the expectations that go along with that particular role.

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Make a list of some of the expectations that go along with being a man or a woman in your society. Do you follow all these expectations? What are the results if or when you don't follow some of the expectations?

Sex role theory emerged from within the larger paradigm of the structural-functionalist approach in sociology. This approach posited differences in sex roles for women as compared to those for men. One way structural-functionalist sociologists such as Talcott Parsons explained these differences was in terms of instrumental versus expressive roles (Parsons & Bales, 1955). Men were taught in childhood and throughout their lives to be **instrumental**, or goal and task oriented, whereas women were taught to be **expressive**, or oriented toward interactions with other people.

This particular division of labor into instrumental and expressive activities was considered functional for society, so women who worked outside the home or men who wanted to stay home and take care of their children created dysfunction for society. The concept of sex roles, rather than challenging the predominant gender ideology of the time, actually reinforced it. You should note at this point that this sociological theory, based on "objective" social

science methods, also contained a normative component. Functional theory doesn't just describe the way society is but also makes claims to the way society *should* be to function most effectively.

You can see how this theory could be problematic for sociologists and feminists committed to ending or lessening gender inequality. During the period when sociologists were dealing with the concept of sex roles, Betty Friedan (1963) wrote her famous book *The Feminine Mystique* and identified what she called "the problem with no name." That problem was the lack of fulfillment experienced by many women who did not work for pay outside the home. The 1950s in America witnessed a period when many women (though mostly white, straight, middle-class women) were encouraged to become homemakers, a relatively new and rare phenomenon in the long history of gender. How could sex role theory help create a justification for these women moving outside the home and back into the workplace, a goal of many feminists? A theory that supported these sex roles as good for the whole of society seemed unlikely to serve that purpose.

Another problem with the concept of sex roles is that it is underdeveloped theoretically. It rests on the assumption that sex roles develop through socialization, or the process through which we learn the ways of a particular group. We discuss socialization in more depth in Chapter 4, but this explanation does not account for the particular content of sex roles in different societies. How do we explain the variations in sex roles we have already discussed? Why is it OK for some men to cry and not for others?

The concept of sex roles as it was initially articulated left many questions unanswered, but the use of social roles to explore how gender works remains a common way of understanding this aspect of society. For example, research on the gender of love uses the concept of instrumental and expressive types of intimacy. Although the particular terminology of sex roles is less popular in today's study of gender, the idea of gender as a social role was an important contribution, one that has been built on by subsequent theorists.

Interactionist Theories

The next theory moves to the level of interaction as the important site for the study of gender. This means that doing gender argues for the importance of interaction to our understanding of gender and sees gender as something produced in groups among individuals rather than as residing within an individual.

Sex Categorization

The process of sex categorization is an important interactionist approach, so we need to understand this concept first. **Sex categorization** is the way we use cues of culturally presumed appearance and behavior to represent physical gender differences that we generally cannot see (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Sex

categorization is similar to gender attribution, discussed in Chapter 1. Compared to many species, humans have less dramatic visible gender markers. In many bird species, males and females are different colors, and many other animal species have considerable size differences between the sexes. It's fairly easy to tell the difference between a male and a female robin, for example, but not as easy to tell the differences between a woman and a man.

As humans, we rely mainly on cultural cues like clothing, hair length, movement, gestures, and conversation to differentiate men from women because most of us don't walk around naked or with our distinguishing body parts exposed to plain view. As discussed in Chapter 1, we rely on cultural genitalia. We engage in categorization for all kinds of statuses, like age, race, class background, and sexual orientation. But research shows that we engage in *sex* categorization automatically and, most of the time, unconsciously (Brewer & Lui, 1989; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992).

In general, the only time we have to stop and think about sex categorization is when there's some doubt as to the sex category of the person with whom we're interacting. But in most cases, because we put people into sex categories without even really having to think about it, we are never interacting with a gender-neutral person. It is never as simple as the "doctor talks to the patient" but always the "*female* doctor talks to the *male* patient." Sex categorization is important to both of the interactionist theories we'll discuss because you have to be able to identify the gender of people (or, at least, *believe* that you can identify the sex of someone) before you can argue that gender matters in interaction.

Cultural Artifact 2.1

Raising Gender-Neutral Children

Incorrectly categorizing someone's sex can be upsetting—to the person doing the categorizing as well as to the person being categorized. Infants don't have any of the physical cues we generally use to sex-categorize adults, and this is why some parents make sure to provide their babies with clear gender markers. How many baby girls have you seen with pink bows fixed to their hairless heads? Dressing your newborn in clearly feminine or masculine clothing prevents that awkward moment when you ask about someone's little girl only to find out he's really a baby

boy. But some parents intentionally prevent people from sex-categorizing their children by refusing to reveal the sex of their child. Couples in Sweden, England, and Canada have all stirred controversy by keeping the sex of their child a secret from anyone outside the family, sometimes even from siblings. One couple kept their son Sasha's sex a secret until he was 5, revealing his sex only when he started primary school (Wilkes, 2012). Like many other parents who have made this decision, Sasha's parents were motivated by a desire to protect their child from the

stereotyping that gender brings. But in the media, these parents face harsh criticism suggesting that their decisions to raise gender-neutral children are potentially damaging. Kathy Witterick, who has not disclosed the gender of her child, Storm, explained, "The discussion that emerges [about raising gender-neutral children] not only 'outs' people (in their rush to judge, they demonstrate the prevailing views), but also has the effect of helping people examine whether they truly do believe the status quo to be the best that we can do. Is this the best that we can do to grow healthy, happy, kind, well adjusted children?" (Gillies, 2011, para. 15). Because the phenomenon of raising gender-neutral children is relatively new, there's no evidence on the long-term effects. Is imposing sex categorization on children in their best interests? Could a widespread movement to raise gender-neutral children have an effect on reducing gender inequality?

Doing Gender

Doing gender, a theory developed first by Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987), was one of the first theories to strongly emphasize interaction as the site for the study of gender, a shift that these theorists argue makes interactionist theories more inherently sociological. From a doing-gender perspective, gender is a performance, and we're all constantly on stage.

The perspective of doing gender is informed by a particular approach in sociology called ethnomethodology. If you break down the etymology of **ethnomethodology**, a hard enough word to pronounce, it basically means the study of folkways. Ethnomethodologists are interested in uncovering the taken-for-granted rules that govern our social life but lie largely unexamined most of the time. They're interested in how aspects of our social lives that seem objective, real, and universal are actually created in specific situations and contexts (Zimmerman, 1978). A famous example of how early ethnomethodologists engaged in this project is the use of breaching experiments.

In breaching experiments, ethnomethodologists send students out to create a purposeful **breach** in social life, or a disruption that requires some kind of explanation because it does not fit into the particular cultural story being told. In one breaching experiment, students responded to the statement "How are you?" with a detailed description of their current state of being. For example, they might say, "Well, I'm getting over a cold, so my nose is a bit stuffed up, and I had a fight with my best friend, so I'm worried about that. I feel like I did a good job on my biology exam, so at the moment, I guess I'm OK." As with many breaching experiments, people responded with confusion, discomfort, and sometimes annoyance or anger. Answering the question "How are you?" in this way breaks with a basic kind of trust we have in our fellow interactants that they are aware of and will follow the rules for smooth and successful interaction. In this case, the rule that's being broken is that when someone asks "How are you?" it is generally not appropriate to give an

actual answer to the question. "How are you?" should be treated as a greeting rather than a question.

That's an abbreviated summary of what is involved in an ethnomethodological approach, but it's meant to give you some sense of the backdrop against which doing gender was developed as a theory. As applied to gender, this perspective is interested in uncovering the assumptions concealed in the way we think about and live gender. One particularly influential ethnomethodologist, Harold Garfinkel (1967), began the process of applying ethnomethodology to gender when he became interested in the case of a transgender woman named Agnes (a pseudonym Garfinkel used to protect the real identity of Agnes). Agnes was raised as a boy but, at the age of 17, adopted a female identity and eventually underwent gender confirming surgery (also called sex reassignment surgery) to become a woman. Garfinkel, and later West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009), used Agnes as a case to begin an examination of how gender works. Why would you pick a transgender person as a starting place for examining gender? For the doing-gender perspective, it has to do with the way Agnes as a case helps us understand the differences between sex category and gender.

We've already discussed conflicting definitions of sex in Chapter 1. The perspective of doing gender follows a strong social constructionist approach. This means that from a doing-gender perspective, sex category is something produced socially rather than objectively as real biological or genetic differences between women and men. Agnes's desire for gender confirming surgery to correct her perception that her penis was a "mistake" in need of remedy is itself an act that reaffirms that sex is socially produced. Despite having a penis (an indicator of being male and a man), Agnes felt like a woman. Her **gender identity**, or her internal sense of her gender, was feminine.

From a doing-gender perspective, gender assignment, or putting someone into one or the other sex category, usually at birth, is considered by society to be merely a case of discovering the "facts of the matter" (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). These facts are based on genitalia, chromosome type, and perhaps the presence or absence of various hormones, and we assume these will all line up in the appropriate ways (presence of a penis lines up with XY chromosomes, which lines up with the presence of appropriate amounts of testosterone at puberty). As we discussed in Chapter 1, this is not necessarily true, as the case of intersex individuals demonstrates, and the criteria for gender assignment can vary across time and cultures (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). Nonetheless, most of us in Anglo-European society believe in the existence of two sexes and in our ability to see a world that consists of two sexes, even though the indicators of sex (genitalia, chromosomes, and hormones) are generally hidden from us.

But what about Agnes, who was born as a biological man but wanted to become a biological woman? How does someone learn to perform a gender different from the one in which they were born into? Answering this question leads us to the important connection between sex categorization and *the accomplishment of gender*. Being categorized as a woman does not mean everything you do is automatically

feminine. If you stop for a minute, you can probably think of many women who do not act in feminine ways and many men who do not act in masculine ways. But acting "unfeminine" does not also make you "un-female." This means the relationship between sex categorization and gender is more complicated. What Agnes needed was some configuration of behavior that would lead people to see her as femininely gendered and, therefore, to assume that she was also a woman (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009). How might Agnes learn to act feminine?

One potential source would be various women's magazines or books on etiquette. These manuals lay out specific ground rules for what makes feminine or, sometimes more specifically, ladylike behavior. Agnes could simply follow these rules, but from the doing-gender perspective, there are problems with this solution. Strictly following some set of rules for feminine behavior might get Agnes into trouble because the enactment of gender is deeply situational and contextual. For example, one particular middle-class American norm is that women are expected to smile more, often including smiling at people they do not know. A guide to proper American feminine behavior might tell Agnes to smile often to be identifiable as a woman.

But the rule would have to be more specific and contextual than that. It might be OK for Agnes to smile at a grocery clerk or waiter, but should she also smile at everyone in the women's restroom? Should she smile at strangers on a busy city street? If Agnes is with her boyfriend, should she smile at other men? What if she's alone on a dark street in the middle of the night? In addition, if Agnes were trying to pass as a woman in many cultures outside the United States, smiling at strange people would not be considered a particularly feminine behavior, and it could get her into trouble. Even in some European countries, a woman who makes eye contact with a strange man, let alone smiles at him, is interpreted as making a pass. The rules about smiling and gender quickly become infinitely complex and too complicated to be codified into any simple set of rules.

The doing-gender perspective argues that rather than a set of rules, what someone like Agnes needs is to make sure her actions are *accountable* as feminine. Accountability is an important concept from ethnomethodology, and it highlights the importance of the interactional nature of gender. **Accounts** are the descriptions we engage in as social actors to explain to each other the state of affairs, or what we think is going on (Heritage, 1987). They are important because they serve a variety of purposes in interaction; they can help us identify, categorize, explain, or just draw attention to some activity or situation and therefore provide us with some kind of framework for understanding it (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009). Accounts help us to make sense of the events and interactions that go on around us.

Accountability, then, has an inherently social and interactional quality; it's determined by how people react to each other. What does all that mean? When you tell a story about a chicken crossing the road or about a priest, a rabbi, and an imam, it's really only a joke if it's *accountable* as a joke—or if the people to whom you're telling the story acknowledge it as a joke. Laughing at the story is one kind of account, in that when you laugh, you're identifying the story as a joke. But even

if no one laughs, your audience can still provide an account that acknowledges your story as a joke. They might roll their eyes or shake their heads or groan, but all of those reactions acknowledge that the story you told was, in fact, a joke . . . just not a very good one.

Your story is not accountable as a joke if someone stares at you blankly or asks what a story about a chicken has to do with anything. Ethnomethodologists argue that in our interactions, we work to make our actions accountable—even though this always depends on the reaction of others. When we tell a joke, even if it's bad, we'd like it to at least be considered a joke by our audience. **Accountability** means that we gear our actions with attention to our specific circumstances so that others will recognize our actions for what they are (Heritage, 1987); we want our joke to be understood as a joke, and we're likely to be embarrassed and chagrined if it is not.

How does that apply to our particular focus—gender? The doing-gender perspective argues that gender is all about rendering your actions accountable as gendered. Sex category is omnirelevant, which is to say that it matters in all situations, all the time. If sex category matters in every situation, then every activity you engage in can be held accountable as a performance of gender, or as being a man or a woman. Using our example of the joke, this highlights two important aspects of the doing-gender perspective. The first is that you don't have to conform to normative ideas of gender in order for your performance to be perceived as accountable. Even a bad joke is still a joke as long as it's considered by your audience to be accountable as a joke. Even behavior that doesn't conform to gender norms can be viewed as gendered if your fellow interactants judge it accountable as a performance of gender. This is important because it explains why people can engage in behavior inconsistent with their gender while still being perceived as belonging to their particular sex category. For many people, crying is considered unmanly, but a man who starts crying is generally not suddenly categorized as a female. Even with crying, his overall set of behaviors is probably still considered accountable as male.

The second important aspect of doing gender that's demonstrated here is that gender is inherently interactional. You can gear your actions to make them accountable, but in the end, accountability is a product of social interaction. Try as you may to tell something that you consider a joke, if no one else considers it as such, it's not really a joke. In the same way, regardless of whether you are or are not trying to portray your actions as gendered, if they are accountable as such, they are in fact an example of doing gender. Gender, from this perspective, is defined not just as your own performance but rather as that performance combined with its accountability. Where is gender located? It's in the intersection between what you do and whether others consider those actions to be accountable as gender. Agnes's solution is not to follow some guidebook or rules for how to be a woman; rather, she needs to become practiced at producing a set of behaviors that are held as accountable for a woman in her particular context and culture.

This unique way of thinking about gender is hard to grasp because gender becomes more than the sum of how we think or feel (dispositions or traits) or even

what we do (behaviors). Theorists within the doing-gender perspective argue that by moving the location of gender outside individuals and into the space of interaction, the result is a uniquely sociological approach to understanding gender: Gender becomes deeply social in nature.

In addition, it's important to be able to understand gender in this way because it helps explain the powerfully strong belief most people in society have in the notion of sex as something objectively real. When we produce gender daily in routine, recurring ways, we also produce the notion that our actions and perceptions of those actions reflect our masculine and feminine natures (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2009). For example, we tend to believe that men, because of their sex category, don't know anything about menstruation. So women don't talk about menstruation with or around men. Because women rarely talk about menstruation to men, not surprisingly, men end up not knowing much about menstruation. In this sense, the doing-gender perspective argues that gender works like a magic act. Our accomplishment of gender confirms our notion that we're merely acting out the "natural" division of human beings into two sexes, and it creates the illusion that such a thing exists. It's a magic act in the sense that this performance creates a belief in something that is really all smoke and mirrors: the existence of something called sex.

How does the doing-gender perspective explain the existence of gender inequality? To say that gender is a performance for which we are accountable does not automatically imply anything about inequality between men and women. Theorists working from this perspective explain inequality through the concept of allocation (West & Fenstermaker, 1993). **Allocation** is simply the way decisions get made about who does what, who gets what and who does not, who gets to make plans, and who gets to give orders or take them (West & Fenstermaker, 1993). The doing-gender perspective argues that the accountability of gender is more likely to be called into question when issues of allocation are involved. Like status characteristics theory, the doing-gender perspective posits a widespread and deeply held belief in our society that women are both different from and inferior to men. This shapes the way in which women will be held accountable for gender, especially when issues of allocation are involved.

Allocation can become important in something as simple as a routine conversation, in decisions about who does housework and childcare in a family, and in the different expectations for men and women in the workplace. The doing-gender perspective demonstrates allocation in simple conversations between white, middle-class men and women, where the particular kind of work to be allocated is making topical transitions when one topic runs out of steam in a conversation. Research on conversations has shown that unilateral topic changes—topic changes initiated by one person instead of collaboratively by conversation partners—are always initiated by men. In this instance the resource being allocated is control over what two people will talk about in a conversation. Men accomplish gender in conversation by changing the topic, and this seems to be especially true when women move the conversation toward topics not necessarily considered

consistent with ideas of masculinity (West & Garcia, 1988). In this small way, men are producing an accountable performance of masculinity. Later, we'll read about how the division of household labor among couples can also serve as a resource for doing gender, as can the battle over who gets to hold and use the remote control in families. In all these examples, allocation of certain duties and responsibilities explains how gender inequality is accomplished from a doing-gender perspective.

Undoing or Redoing Gender?

There's little doubt that doing gender as a theoretical perspective has become the dominant paradigm for the sociological study of gender (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009). The seminal article by West and Zimmerman has been cited 634 times since it was first published, 60 times in 2005 alone (Deutsch, 2007). The article is reprinted in countless gender textbooks and read by untold numbers of students every year. Like all good theories, doing gender continues to be revised and adapted. Most recently, sociologists have focused on two main questions in regard to this theory.

First, researchers have asked whether doing gender is truly omnirelevant, or whether we do gender equally in every situation. Some researchers suggest we should explore whether gender is always being performed (Deutsch, 2007). For example, sex categorization may take place in every interaction, but it's unclear whether it's equally important to all interactions. Some studies suggest that gender stereotypes are less important in situations where we're cognitively busy (distracted by something else), when we have self-interested motives, and when we're exposed to counterstereotypical thoughts and images (Deutsch, 2007). So are there situations in which we do gender a little less?

Assuming the answer to this first question is yes, this leads to the *second question*—is it possible to undo gender? Some have read doing-gender theory to say that individual strategies in any given interaction cannot challenge a system of discrimination (Deutsch, 2007). Accountability may shift sometimes in ways that lead to less oppressive ways of doing gender, but the idea of accountability itself never goes away (West & Zimmerman, 2009). That is, we can redo gender but never undo gender.

Francine M. Deutsch (2007) has suggested that it *is* possible to undo gender and that we should alter the doing-gender framework to accommodate that possibility. Doing gender should be used to describe social interactions that do reproduce gender differences, while undoing gender would be employed for situations that reduce gender difference. For example, Catherine Connell (2010) demonstrates that trans people in the workplace do gender, undo gender, and redo gender as they negotiate the complicated relationship between sex, gender, and sex category.

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Do you think we do gender in all situations? Can you think of examples of undoing gender—situations in which our interactions challenge gender inequality?

Institutional or Structural Approaches

The next two theories we discuss locate gender at the level of institutions or in the social structure of society. If you think about our exploration of theory as a large-zoom camera, we started with an extreme close-up of individuals and what goes on inside their heads. Then we zoomed out a bit to the level of groups and interaction. In this final zoom, we move our lens far out to encompass large organizations and the way societies as a whole fit together.

Gendered Organizations

In the chronological evolution of theoretical approaches to gender, the shift to a focus on organizations comes relatively late. As you read, during the second wave of the feminist movement in Anglo-European society, feminists made the claim that gender is an integral part of societal institutions and structures. But systematic analysis of the gendered ways in which these structures were organized was somewhat slow to emerge in sociological analysis. As Joan Acker (1990) pointed out, this analysis requires seeing through what appear to be the gender-neutral practices of organizations to uncover their powerfully gendered nature. This approach, sometimes called *macrostructural*, shifts the focus from individuals or interaction to social aggregates (Dunn, Almquist, & Chafetz, 1993). **Social aggregates** are *composed* of individuals, but they become more than the sum of the individuals within them.

A macrostructural approach to gender assumes that gender is more than individual traits or interaction between those individuals; as a part of social aggregates, gender takes on a life of its own. Within the gendered-organizations approach, this means that organizations can create gendered individuals and shape gendered interactions, but gender is working from the top down (from organizations down to the level of individuals and interactions) rather than from the bottom up (from individuals or interactions to organizations).

What exactly does it mean to call an organization gendered? A **gendered organization** is one in which "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker, 1990, p. 146). This is another way of saying that the normal functioning of the organization is based on gender and has important gendered consequences. From this perspective, gender is not simply something that you add into your basic understanding of how an organization works; because everything about the organization is gendered, there are no gender-neutral processes in this type of organization. Instead, gender is a basic and integral part of how the organization functions.

According to Acker (1990), organizations produce gender through five interrelated processes. *First*, gendered organizations create divisions along gender lines, whether in physical location, power, or behaviors. For example, your

average gym in the United States has a separate locker room for women and men, as well as areas that are generally considered more or less masculine (the free-weight room versus the aerobics room). *Second*, gendered organizations construct symbols or images that can support or oppose those divisions. There may be inspirational posters in the gym that portray slim women and bulked-up, muscular men, reinforcing the sense that women are at the gym to become thin while men are there to become larger. *Third*, gendered organizations produce types of interaction that reinforce these divisions and inequality. In the gendered space of the free-weight room, men may interact in very different ways than the women in the aerobics rooms or using cardio equipment. The lone woman wandering around in the free-weight room may be made to feel out of place or be offered assistance by gym workers, just as the lone man taking an aerobics class may be expected to be a little less capable in that area. In one gym I belonged to, there was a sauna in the men's locker room but not in the women's, representing an inequality of resources.

Table 2.1 demonstrates these five key features.

Gendered organizations also have an impact on individual identity, the *fourth* important process. The woman who repeatedly finds herself surrounded by men in the free-weight room may feel subtle pressure to stop lifting weights, and this pressure may change her own idea of appropriate exercise for women. She may internalize these messages in a way that makes her feel more positive about a slim body rather than a muscular body. Note, for both the third and fourth processes—interaction and individual identity—gendered organizations affect these processes from the top down, with the organization itself impacting your internal sense of gender as well as how you interact.

The *fifth* and final process is the way in which gender helps to both create and reinforce social structures. Acker (1990) argued that this happens through **organizational logic**, or the assumptions and practices that underlie an organization. If gyms as organizations are structured in ways that assume basic gender differences, then they are building gender into the organizational structure. To get at the organizational logic of a gym, you might ask why the gym is divided into different areas in the first place. Why do most gyms separate the free weights from the weight machines or from the treadmills, bikes, and stair-climbing machines? Is there an underlying gender logic that separates the uses of the gym based on the assumed gender of the typical user (i.e., free weights are for men and StairMasters are for women)?

Table 2.1   Questions to Ask About Gender Theories
How does this theory define gender?
Where does this theory locate gender—inside the individual, within interactions, or as embedded in institutions?
How does this theory explain the connection between gender and inequality?

Gendered organization theory has been used most often to explain the gendered dynamics of the workplace (Britton, 2000). For example, a study of litigation attorneys and paralegals demonstrated that there are gendered assumptions built into how people conceive of these jobs (Pierce, 1995). The ideal litigator is Rambo-like in his single-handed pursuit of his enemy's destruction, regardless of the effect on the lives of people involved. A male attorney described courtrooms as "a male thing . . . It's a competition" (Pierce, 1995, p. 68). Jobs defined in these highly gendered terms force people to confront a set of norms that are difficult to negotiate. If courtrooms are thought of as "a male thing," how do women find a place in these spaces?

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Think of an organization you're familiar with. Can you identify gendered aspects in the organizational logic of that organization?

Both jobs and hierarchies are supposed to be abstract categories, devoid of gender. But how would organizational logic describe the perfect human to hold the generic job? The closest thing to that abstract worker is a male employee whose whole life is centered on his job and who has a wife or some other woman to take care of his own needs as well as those of any family he might have (Acker, 1990). This idea is sometimes called the **ideal worker norm** (Williams, 2000). In their study of family-friendly policies at Best Buy, Kelly, Ammons, Chermack, and Moen (2010) found that the ideal worker norm was difficult for employees to defy. Even though there was a family-friendly policy that renounced long hours, visible busyness, and accepting unplanned work as signs of commitment or productivity, both women and men were cautious about taking advantage of this policy without incurring penalties. Because the ideal worker norm is so firmly entrenched, it becomes difficult to defy. Research into gender and organizations has demonstrated how organizational logic also works in the granting of patents (Bunker Whittington & Laurel, 2008); in high-tech companies in Silicon Valley, California (Baron, Hannan, Hsu, & Kocak, 2007); and even at the United Nations (Keaney-Mischel, 2008).

Homophily: A Social Network Approach to Gender

Like gendered organization theory, a network approach to gender focuses on the importance of social structure. The main focus of this theory is a different type of social aggregate—the social network. Network theory, like status characteristics theory, takes a more general theory from sociology and applies it specifically to explaining how gender works.

Network theory is not concerned with the particular attributes of an individual—their gender, race, religious background, age, and so on. In network theory, individual actors are understood only in light of their relationships to other actors. People, according to network theory, are "identically endowed, interchangeable nodes" (Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1995). It might be odd to think of yourself as a mere interchangeable node, but for network theorists, your individual characteristics are less important than the people you are connected to and how you are connected to them. From this perspective, gender is considered

a product of the social relationships in which women and men are embedded; the behaviors or attitudes we perceive as masculine and feminine are really a result of our positions in particular social networks.

To understand this way of thinking about gender, we have to first understand some basic concepts about networks. Network theorists conceive of a network in terms of an **ego**, or focal person, and the **alters**, or other people in the network. When they focus on these specific relationships, between an ego and the alters, they are focusing on an **ego network** rather than on the whole, simultaneous web of connections in a society. Ego networks can have three properties: size, density, and heterogeneity (Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1995). **Size** is the number of others to whom someone is linked in a network. **Density** measures how interconnected the alters are in an ego network; in a dense network, many of the people you are connected to are also connected to each other. **Diversity** in a social network means you have contacts with people in multiple spheres of activity, as opposed to all of your alters being similar to each other. A diverse network is good in the sense that it provides you with information from many distinct sources in your network.

Network theorists also describe networks in terms of their structure. A way to think about network structure is to consider what ties are present or absent in your network; what spots are occupied in your network, and where are the holes? One way of talking about network structure that is particularly important to the discussion of gender is the concept of homophily. There seems to be a tendency for networks to be **homophilous**, which means that "similar nodes are more likely to have a relationship than dissimilar nodes" (Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1995, p. 228). Remembering that you are one of those interchangeable nodes, this simply means that you're more likely to be friends or in a relationship with someone who's like you than you are with someone who's not like you. If two men are more likely to discuss baseball with each other than with a woman, then their relationship (discussing baseball) is homophilous.

Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of how social network theorists think about social networks.

Homophily works as a concept regardless of whether it's an individual choice, and some research suggests that it's more about the kind of people to whom you're exposed. So saying your networks are homophilous doesn't necessarily mean you don't like people who aren't like you; it's more a reflection of the fact that our society is structured in ways that make it difficult to form relationships with people who aren't like you. Network theorists argue that homophily has important implications for how gender impacts the social networks of men and women. Their argument is that small initial differences in the types of networks and experiences of boys and girls lead to men and women occupying different social worlds (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1995).

At about the time children enter school, they first begin to demonstrate homophily in their play patterns; in addition, girls demonstrate a tendency to play in smaller groups than boys. Why exactly this is true is subject to debate, but

Figure 2.1 Ego and Alter
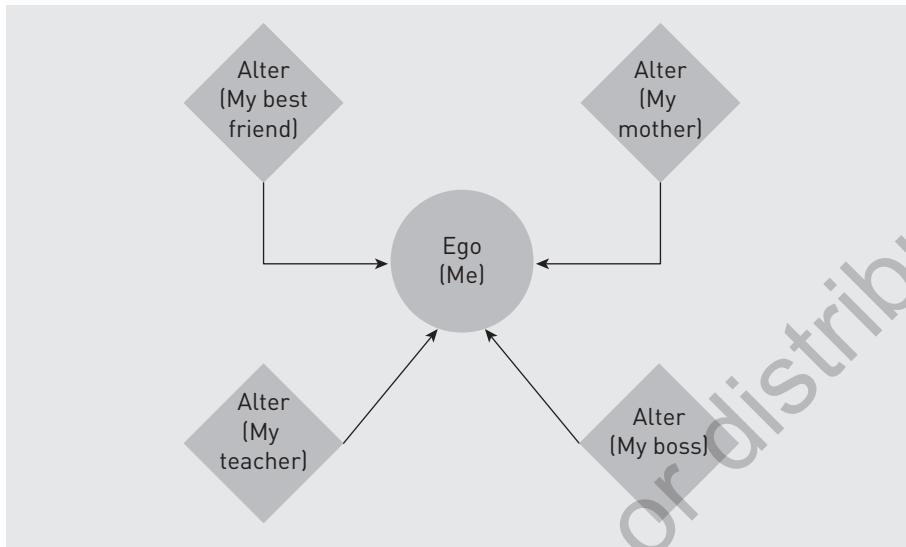
Source: Adapted from: Smith-Lovin, L. and McPherson, J.M. (1995). You are who you know: A network approach to gender. In P. England, (ed.) *Theory on gender/feminism on theory* (pp. 223–251). New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

network theorists argue that it has important implications. Research demonstrates that children are generally more likely to add other children of the same gender to their particular friendship groups, or networks, than they are to add children of a different gender. When you compare boys and girls, girls are generally less likely to extend or receive offers of friendship. The result of these two dynamics is networks among children that are gender segregated and larger and more diverse (heterogeneous) for boys than for girls (McPherson et al., 2001).

Network theorists then point to the important ways in which knowledge is related to networks. Research suggests that our knowledge about the world around us is grounded in the relationships to which we belong. Boys and girls in their gender-segregated networks will gradually come to be exposed to different types of knowledge. The effect of these networks organized around gender is to make what were initially small distinctions between boys and girls seem more and more important. The little boy who spends most of his time talking to other boys about the latest video game will find it difficult to participate in girls' discussions of the latest fashion YouTuber. The little boy's inability to know about fashion YouTubers will begin to seem like a real and important difference between him and little girls. That difference will only be further reinforced by network differences

across the life course, but network theorists argue that gender is ultimately the result of the time spent within these gender-segregated groups in childhood. The composition, size, and heterogeneity of the networks boys and girls are in produce gender differences.

These differences in networks continue long after we leave childhood. Research reveals that although men and women generally have networks of similar size, women's networks have fewer ties to nonkin, or to people who are not family (Ibarra, 1992; Marsden, 1987; McPherson et al., 2001; Pugliesi & Shook, 1998; Wellman, 1985). Homophily, including homophily along the lines of gender, remains an important characteristic of networks into adulthood. Because women have more ties to kin and neighbors, their networks are also less racially, ethnically, and religiously heterogeneous but more heterogeneous in regard to age and gender. Certain life course events can also have important impacts on the characteristics of women's networks. Some research has shown that having children greatly reduces women's cross-gender contacts, in part because of their increased responsibility for child-rearing (Wellman, 1985).

Some researchers argue that this contraction of women's networks as a result of having children, along with the higher inclusion of kin in their networks, makes women's networks less useful in the realm of work (Campbell, 1988; Fernandez & Sosa, 2005; Ibarra, 1992; McGuire, 2000; McPherson et al., 2001; Renuzulli, Aldrich, & Moody, 2000; van Emmerik, 2006). The flow of information through women's networks is less likely to help them find a job, move up in their occupation, or start their own business than men. This is because kin networks tend to be fairly dense and local; your mother, father, brother, and sister are closely connected and therefore likely to know the same things about the same geographic place. Networks that are less dense have fewer overlapping members and so are more likely to carry different information from different sources. Gender differences also exist in the organizational networks to which women belong, because women tend to belong to fewer organizations than men (Booth, 1972), and the organizations they do belong to are more likely to be organized around social and religious activities than around work-related activities (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1986; McPherson et al., 2001).

According to network theory, networks begin in childhood and the school years in gendered patterns, and these patterns, once begun, continue throughout our lives. These networks are important to the creation of gender because, network theorists argue, we are a product of the spaces we fill in these networks. Research demonstrates that these networks can affect how we volunteer (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007), the acquisition of social capital across our lives (McDonald & Mair, 2010), the expression of aggression (Faris & Felmlee, 2011), and men's sexual performance (Cornwell & Laumann, 2011).

The relationships in which we spend most of our time determine the roles we play (McPherson et al., 2001; Stryker, 1987). The nature of women's networks, consisting of more kin and fewer coworkers, means that women will spend more time performing the roles associated with kin rather than with coworkers; network theory predicts that a woman will spend more time being a mother, daughter, or sister than she will spend being a worker, professional, or boss (Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1995). A man, with his network composed of more coworkers or organization members, will spend more time performing those nonkin roles. What we experience as gender is really a product of the networks of relationships we find ourselves embedded in, going all the way back to the first networks we belonged to as children.

Network theory explains inequality because of the general effects a network can have on basic aspects of your life, such as health and wealth. Interestingly, the health of both men and women benefits from ties to women (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988), which may be why widowers (husbands who have lost their wives) suffer declines in mental and physical health after the loss of their wives. Women's more heavily kin-based networks are good for women's health, as they receive more social support from them, but they are also often expected to be the caregivers in these networks (Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1995). But although women experience health benefits from their social networks, their networks do not work to their benefit economically. Namely, women lack the widely spread, weak ties to nonkin individuals so important to finding a job and achieving advancement (Granovetter, 1974).

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) work on women in corporations provided some of the most powerful evidence for the importance of networks for women in the workplace. According to Kanter's research, even men and women who occupy the same position in a corporation or firm are likely to have different types of networks. The male worker will tend to be closer friends with his male boss and other male clients. He might socialize after work with large numbers of his coworkers, and because of these relationships, clients might be more likely to come to him than to his identical female coworker. His female coworker with the same educational background and experience will have networks composed of fewer coworkers in general, and those coworkers might tend to be the few other women at the firm. Networks serve as a handicap for women in the workplace and make it more difficult for them to achieve the same kind of success as men. Thus, the differences in the networks of women and men explain the inequality that exists between these two groups.

Intersectional Feminist Theory

Black Lives Matter, as a hashtag and a social movement, seeks to bring attention to systematic violence against African Americans (Garza, 2014). The movement started in the wake of the murder of Trayvon Martin, who was shot by neighborhood watch

volunteer George Zimmerman in Florida. Martin's death was followed by a similar case in Ferguson, Missouri, when Mike Brown, a young Black man, was also shot and killed by police. Neither man was armed or committing a crime at the time of his murder. Both of these cases involved young Black men, and certainly most media attention focused on violence against this specific group.

But the Black Lives Matter movement from the beginning was an intersectional movement. You might be surprised to learn that the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement are three Black women who self-identify as queer—Opal Tometi, Patrisse Cullors, and Alicia Garza (Tillet, 2015). Maybe you will be surprised to learn that Black women are also victims of police violence; a short list includes Sandra Bland in 2015 and Reika Boyd in 2012 (Tillet, 2015). Trans men and trans women of color are also victimized by the police. About 80% of the murders of transgender people in 2018 were committed against trans women of color. By July 2019, more than 10 trans women of color had been murdered, victims of **transmisogynoir**, or the specific hatred of transgender women of color who sit at the intersection of three interlocking systems of oppression—sexism, cissexism, and racism (Sonoma, 2019). Despite the ways the founders of this movement sought to address violence against African Americans in all its forms, the roles of women and the LGBTQ community were often pushed to the side. This tendency points to the continuing importance and relevance of an intersectional approach to our study of gender and social life in general.

Intersectionality as an approach is nothing new. As we've already discussed, it goes back to the very beginnings of the global women's movements. Intersectionality as a theory and a movement starts with the tendency of feminists and gender theorists to focus on gender to the exclusion of any other type of identities. Here's something you may or may not have noticed about the theories we've discussed. They all separate gender from any of the other many identities and statuses we occupy. Gender is considered separately from statuses such as race, ethnicity, age, class, nationality, and sexuality. These theories, as I have described them, assume that gender is something you can pluck out of the very complicated, messy stuff that is our lives to examine in a pristine state. Does gender really work that way? Can you ever simply be a "man," in interaction, or are you always also raced, classed, and sexualized? These questions have been asked over time by women of color and working-class women like Sojourner Truth, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, Rosalinda Mendez Gonzalez, and Maxine Baca Zinn, to name just a few. Intersectionality as an approach argues that it's impossible and undesirable to separate out all the different identities we occupy in order to examine gender alone.

But how do we go about embracing the complexity of our lived experience of gender? In our attempts to incorporate intersectionality, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argued that two basic problems must be overcome. The *first problem* is an underlying belief in dichotomies or oppositions. You can be either Black *or* white, man *or* woman, straight *or* gay, but you cannot be *both* at the same time, and these things exist as opposites of each other. This oppositional,

either/or thinking is especially problematic when you add the ideas of oppressed or oppressor and privileged or not privileged. A Hispanic man in the United States is in a position of privilege relative to his gender, but he may be oppressed relative to his ethnicity; his status makes him both oppressed and oppressor, and this violates the underlying assumption of either/or thinking—that you are either in one category or the other.

The *second problem* that stands in the way of thinking intersectionally is the idea that these dichotomous differences can be put into some meaningful system of ranking (Collins & Andersen, 1993). The ranking of men as superior to women, whites as superior to Asians, and heterosexuals as superior to homosexuals assumes some quantitative component to the categories, because this ranking implies some kind of logical, numerical order. If you can rank men above women and whites above Asians, then you must also be able to create some ranking of all these identities. But as Collins (1990) pointed out, this assumption breaks down once you begin to think about the real people who occupy these identities. Collins is often asked as a Black woman whether she is more oppressed by her gender or her race, and she says that what the question essentially asks her to do is "divide myself into little boxes and rank my various statuses" (Collins & Andersen, 1993, p. 71). Her actual experience of oppression is not the *either/or* described by dichotomous, oppositional thinking but the *both/and* that exists when you cannot, as she said, conveniently divide yourself up into neat little boxes of identity.

One model for thinking about intersecting identities that seeks to overcome the problems of these two premises uses the metaphor of interlocking identities. This perspective is also sometimes called **multiple consciousness**, which describes a way of thinking that develops from a person's position at the center of "intersecting and mutually reliant systems of oppression" (Ward, 2004, p. 83). This perspective seeks to correct for the tendency to perceive one system of domination as more important or fundamental than another. Gender, race, class, and sexual orientation all need to be recognized as distinct social structures that can be experienced by individuals simultaneously. Multiple consciousness does not ask us to divide ourselves up into neat little boxes of gender, race, class, and sexuality; it acknowledges that these identities interact dynamically in any given situation.

The idea of multiple consciousness in the various forms in which it has been articulated has four basic assumptions. The *first* is that identities such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation work as social structures in what theorists call a matrix of domination. The **matrix of domination** (see Figure 2.2) means that the social structures of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation work with and through each other so that any individual experiences each of these categories differently depending on his or her unique social location (Zinn & Dill, 1996).

?

Make a list of all the identities you occupy that are privileged identities and all the identities you occupy that are not privileged identities. Does your experience of these contradictions feel like the either/or option or the both/and option? How do these various identities interact in your daily life?

Figure 2.2 Matrix of Domination
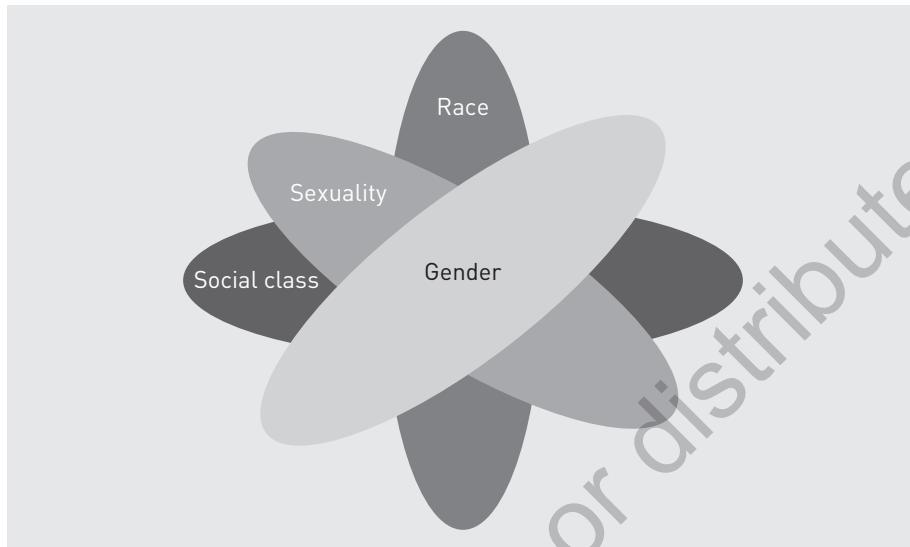
Source: Adapted from: Zinn, M.B and Dill, B.T. (1996). Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism. *Feminist Studies* 22(2). 321–331.

This is another way of saying that it is impossible to ever completely separate gender from the other identities we occupy and the unique ways in which those identities intersect. In addition, the matrix of domination assumes that gender needs the social structures of race, class, and sexual orientation to work, just as race as a social structure needs gender, class, and sexual orientation. For example, the subordination of lower classes works through the social structure of gender. The idea of the housewife had important gender implications, but it was also a tool used to enforce class and racial differences, as poor women and women of color were rarely able to choose not to work outside the home and be housewives in the way upper-class, white women were. Thus, the ideal of the housewife had gender, class, and racial implications, and leaving out any of these social structures results in an incomplete understanding of how and why the ideal of the housewife developed in Anglo-European society.

The *second* basic assumption of multiple consciousness is that these social structures are interlocking and simultaneous. This is a rejection of the idea of statuses as additive or multiplicative in favor of a model of interlocking circles of experience. At any given moment, a person can be within the circles of race, gender, and sexual orientation and experiencing all of them at the same time. The

model is more dynamic in that we can imagine how the movement of one ring might affect the other (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). This model also gets away from the idea that oppressions can or should be ranked and added to each other. In the interlocking model, this is impossible because you cannot separate the categories from each other long enough to do so. The multiple consciousness theory also allows theorists to escape from an either/or ideology.

The *third* basic assumption of this theory is that because of the interlocking and simultaneous nature of categories of difference, they can produce both oppression and privilege. Because of the complex ways in which these identities interact with each other, it is possible to be both/and: oppressed and privileged.

The *fourth* assumption of multiple consciousness is that using an intersectional approach allows for a fuller examination of how identities like race, class, gender, and sexual orientation work themselves out in the lived experiences of real people. Autobiographies and memoirs have sometimes provided the best accounts of the complex interplay of these identities because they focus on lived experiences. Multiple consciousness theorists argue that this approach is especially helpful in highlighting the complexity of these relationships and dynamics.

Other theorists have built on this idea of interlocking systems of oppression and taken the basic premise in a slightly different direction. The doing-gender theory we discussed previously is used to explain how racial and class identities function in interaction. This means that like gender, both race and class are things that are produced in the dynamic world of interaction through the idea of accountability (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Like gender, race is something that has no underlying biological reality; anthropologists, biologists, and other scientists have long since demonstrated the emptiness of race as a biological category. Yet people continue to engage in race categorization based on the belief that there is a category called race and that people can easily be placed into such a category. Moreover, the fact that many people are unsettled when others don't act in ways considered appropriate to their race is evidence of the importance of accountability. We might be disturbed by a white person who "acts Black," and from the doing-difference perspective, this is evidence that accountability applies to race as well. In regard to class, the prevalence of certain types of uniforms is good evidence of the performative nature of class. Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker (1995) give the example of a maid whose employer insisted she wear her uniform when accompanying the family to the beach. Without the uniform, the class background and status of her maid were not immediately obvious to her peers on the beach, and her employee was not therefore accountable as a maid. Perceiving gender, race, and class as situated, ongoing accomplishments make it easier to imagine how they can be "done" simultaneously. You don't do just your gender in any given interaction; you do your gender, your race, your class, and any other identities relevant to the situation and subject to accountability.

Almost 20 years after Kimberlé Crenshaw's original formulation of intersectionality in the context of Black women in the legal system, theorists are still exploring exactly what it means to use an intersectional approach. As an analytic

framework, intersectionality is a way of thinking about sameness and difference and its relation to power (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; McCall, 2005). An intersectional approach, then, conceives of "categories not as distinct but as always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of creating and being created by dynamics of power" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795). Especially important is the emphasis on how power permeates these categories.

Putting It All Together: Integrative Theories

At the beginning of this chapter, I told you that learning theories of gender is useful as a way to help you make sense of the role of gender in your own life. Now that you've learned about the wide variety of theories about gender, and those just from within the discipline of sociology, you may be feeling a little skeptical about their usefulness. Many of these theories define gender in different and often contradictory ways. They give different explanations for why gender inequality exists, and they focus our attention on different areas of social life in our study of gender. How, in the middle of all this confusion, can these theories of gender help us make sense of gender in our own lives? What are we to do with all these theories?

Increasingly, gender theorists themselves have become a bit frustrated by this confusion and have begun to think about how to bring all of these different theories together into some coherent whole (R. W. Connell, 2002; Ferree, Lorber, & Hess, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Risman, 1998, 2004). Developing a more integrative approach to gender should be useful for two reasons (Risman, 2004). *First*, an integrative theoretical model of gender should help to make sense of the vast array of research findings on gender. A more integrative theory could allow for an exploration of diverse topics in the study of gender while retaining the sense of a common endeavor or body of knowledge being built. In other words, researchers asking very different kinds of questions and motivated by different theoretical orientations could still feel as if they're working on the same basic question. *Second*, a theory that works more toward integration moves away from what Risman (2004) called the "modernist warfare version of science" (p. 434). In this model, much like in war, the goal of gender theorists was often to defeat the other theory in a winner-takes-all battle. You might call this the death match model of theorizing.

There are several different versions of these integrative theories out there (hopefully not engaged in the death match model), but in the spirit of bringing these ideas together, we can talk about two common elements in these approaches. *First*, most of these theories attempt to integrate the many divergent strands in gender theorizing by perceiving gender as working at several different levels or in several different ways (Collins & Andersen, 1993; Lorber, 1994; Risman, 2004). Luckily for us, these levels line up pretty closely with the three locations for gender we've already begun to outline: individual, interactional, and institutional. Each level implies different types of questions to be asked about gender and different ways in which gender functions. At the individual level, gender works internally

as a set of values or predispositions that influence our behavior. But gender can also be created through interaction and become deeply embedded in the functioning of our institutions and societies. Perceiving gender this way acknowledges that for any gendered phenomenon, there's probably something important going on at all three levels. At the same time, there may be more to learn about certain phenomena at one level or another.

To show how this works, let's pick a specific example of a gendered phenomenon. You may have seen stories recently about two gendered phenomena—upspeak, or the tendency to raise your voice at the end of a sentence, and vocal fry, defined as the tendency to draw out the ends of words or sentences in a low, creaky voice (Grosse, Eckert, & Sankin, 2015). These verbal patterns have been associated with young women who are criticized for sounding hesitant or annoying. While some question whether vocal fry and upspeak are really a "feminine" speech pattern, others suggest that young women who use these speech patterns are undermining themselves and their abilities (Riley, 2015; Wolf, 2015). What would an integrative approach to this phenomenon look like?

From the individual perspective, we might say that the tendency for young women to use vocal fry and upspeak is part of the social role associated with the status of being a woman in American society. Women learn through the process of gender socialization that making every sentence sound like a question is an important way for women to demonstrate passivity; upspeak makes even the strongest statements contingent rather than assertive claims to truth. This tendency is considered an internal trait.

But how do vocal fry and upspeak *become* internalized? There we might turn to network theory and its emphasis on the way in which small differences in network structure become intensified throughout the life course. In the homophilous groups of childhood, girls might develop and reinforce this behavior while boys might not. For women, in their networks of kin and neighbors, upspeak and vocal fry are an activity that is reinforced. In the world of work and other organizations, these speech mannerisms are not reinforced or rewarded, and so men become less likely to use vocal fry and upspeak.

Table 2.2 provides a guide for thinking about questions to ask about theories as we apply them to a specific topic.

This would be a good explanation of how this works at the institutional or structural level. But exactly how does that process happen? How do these day-to-day interactions produce these gendered behaviors? An interactional theory might be best suited to answering these particular questions. According to the doing-gender perspective, a man doesn't use vocal fry because to do so would not be accountable as masculine within the context of that interaction. The repeated need to produce actions that are accountable as gender then reinforces the original behavior, making the need to use vocal fry feel more like an internal trait, and so on. This example demonstrates how we can begin to perceive these different levels at which gender operates as interconnected and complementary rather than as contradictory and incompatible.

Table 2.2 Five Interrelated Processes of Gendered Organizations Theory

Gendered organizations create divisions along gender lines, whether in physical location, power, or behaviors.
Gendered organizations construct symbols or images that can support or oppose those divisions.
Gendered organizations produce types of interaction that reinforce these divisions and inequality.
Gendered organizations have an impact on individual identity.
Gendered organizations both create and reinforce gender in social structures through organizational logic.

One advantage of integrative theories demonstrated by the previous example is that they help to bridge the gap between structure and agency, or the macro and micro, in sociology. The root of this problem goes back to C. Wright Mills's question of public issues and private troubles. What is the connection between what we do as individuals and the larger social structures that exist in society? We discuss throughout this book how gender influences a wide variety of decisions we make daily. An argument strong on the structural or macro end of this spectrum would be that those decisions are always constrained and limited by social structure. If you're a man in the United States, you didn't get up this morning and make a decision about what to wear. You probably made a decision about what to wear drawing from the subset of clothing deemed acceptable for your gender, as well as for your class, sexual orientation, and perhaps race. A whole set of clothing options (for example, skirts, halter tops, lacy underwear, a sari, a cravat) were already effectively off limits for you. So, then, is that really a choice?

An argument on the micro or agency end of the spectrum would argue that you're still a unique individual with the ability to choose the sari or the skirt if you really want and that those choices have important implications for changing the larger structure. The social structures of society, after all, depend on the support of millions of individuals like you making decisions about what to wear in the morning. In trying to explain why men apologize less, the individual approach emphasizes the choices we make. Social roles become part of who we are, and so our decisions as individuals are important to the way in which gender works. Interactional theories move to the next level, somewhere on the spectrum between the macro and micro. Yes, we make choices, but those choices are constrained by the need to be accountable; they're constrained by the people around us and the ways in which we gear our actions toward them as an audience. In the institutional approach, you are a product of the network of relationships in which you

are embedded. Gender is produced as a result of homophily, a process you as an individual have little control over, and this puts network theory on the macro or structural end of the spectrum. By looking at gender on all of these levels, integrative theories can help us develop a more sophisticated sense of the give-and-take relationship between our individual actions and the social structures that make up gender.

The *second* common element in integrative approaches is that they are generally also intersectional. In addition to attempting to bring together the different gender theories, they also acknowledge the importance of the ways in which gender overlaps with race, class, sexual orientation, and other identities. Going back to our example of vocal fry and upspeak, we might ask if this phenomenon exists across different categories. Do Latina women use vocal fry? Do working-class women? Is this a question about young women or about a specific group of young women? There is still some debate as to exactly how intersectionality fits into the larger theoretical agenda of studying gender. Some theorists argue that not all research needs to be intersectional and that there is value in studying various social structures, such as heterosexism, separately from race, class, or gender (Risman, 2004). Others argue that an intersectional approach does not imply that every research project should focus on all identities equally; rather, it is important to acknowledge at all times the many identities at play in whatever group you happen to be researching.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity as a theory is part of a more recent trend in sociology and social science to "study up." **Studying up** means examining social categories that exist in a privileged or advantaged position. For a long time in sociology, the study of gender basically meant the study of women. The study of race and ethnicity was reduced to the study of nonwhite people. The study of sexuality focused on those who didn't conform to our heteronormative ideas—gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, or polysexual people. When we study up, we shift our focus to men and masculinity, to the construction of whiteness as a social category, and to unpacking assumptions about heterosexuality as normal and natural. We focus our attention on the top of the hierarchy instead of the bottom. The move to study up comes from the realization that these categories of oppression and privilege work together, so if we want to understand femininity, we have to understand masculinity as well.

Enter Raewyn Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity. **Hegemonic masculinity** is a concept that comes from the exploration of how our dominant ideas about what it means to be a man influence the behaviors of actual men in any given society. According to Connell's theory, there is no one male role, as might be assumed in sex role theory, but a variety of masculinities that interact with each other in hierarchical and contested ways. Men enact different versions of this

masculinity depending on where they are located in social hierarchies of power. Hegemonic masculinity is the type of gender practice that, in any given space and time, exists at the top of those hierarchies.

It's important in Connell's formulation to keep in mind that there is not one dominant way of being masculine but only masculinities—of which hegemonic masculinity is but one example. In addition, the particular version of masculinity that is hegemonic changes across times, cultures, and subcultures. The masculinity that is considered hegemonic for preschool kids is not what's hegemonic for grown men, for American men 50 years ago, for Mexican men, or even for the boys at another preschool down the road. Hegemonic masculinities are historically created and contingent. But once a particular version of masculinity becomes hegemonic, it can be used to patrol the behaviors of men or boys within that particular setting.

In any given setting, few men conform to all the exact characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. As Erving Goffman (1963) noted long before the development of this theory, the standards men are held to are so high as to be mostly unreachable:

> In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male
> in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual
> Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good
> complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. (p. 128)

Given the impossibility for most men of perfectly conforming to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, many men engage in **complicit masculinity**. These men receive the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In other words, they're still able to cash in on their **patriarchal dividend**, or the advantage to men as a group for maintaining the unequal gender order, even if they don't perfectly conform to hegemonic masculinity (R. W. Connell & Pearse, 2015).

Other men are not so lucky. Within Connell's formulation, gay men occupy a status of **subordinated masculinity** relative to other groups of men. This means that gay men are at the bottom of the gender hierarchy that exists among men. Homosexuality becomes a repository for all that is expelled from hegemonic masculinity—mostly anything that might be associated with femininity. This group might also include some heterosexual men and boys who are expelled from hegemonic masculinity for being wimps, nerds, sissies, yellowbellies, pushovers, mother's boys, and any other identities that symbolically blur with femininity (R. W. Connell, 2005).

While complicit and subordinated masculinities are internal to the gender order, marginalized masculinity acknowledges the interplay of gender with other categories such as social class or race. **Marginalized masculinity** refers to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups (R. W. Connell, 2005). For example, among white supremacists,

constructions of Black masculinity as characterized by violence or hypersexuality are crucial to the construction of white masculinity. The marginalization of nonwhite masculinities is part of how the dominant model of masculinity is constructed.

Since its original formulation in 1982, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been employed in a wide range of research settings and contexts. Database searches reveal 200 articles that use *hegemonic masculinity* in the title or abstract; a wider search reveals articles in the many hundreds (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Not surprisingly, the concept has come under criticism as well. Some theorists point to the ambiguity of hegemonic masculinity as a concept; if so few men actually conform to the demands of hegemonic masculinity, what is it exactly that we're studying? The historical and cultural contingency of hegemonic masculinity raises similar problems of identifying which group precisely represents the concept in any given setting. Others suggest that this particular way of understanding masculinity doesn't place enough emphasis on the role of power in gender relations. The men who conform to hegemonic masculinity may not necessarily be the most powerful men in society. These critics argue that if this is the case, perhaps we should shift our focus to studying the masculinity of the hegemonic, or an examination of the masculinity of those who hold the most powerful positions in society. Regardless of these critiques, hegemonic masculinity remains a useful tool for understanding masculinity. The concept is especially useful for helping us highlight the ways in which gender exerts pressure to conform on men as well as women.

Table 2.3 summarizes the sociological theories of gender.

Table 2.3 Summary of Sociological Theories of Gender

Theory	Level	Gender-Specific Theory?
Sex roles	Individual	No
Status characteristics	Interactional	No
Doing gender	Interactional	Yes
Gendered organizations	Institutional	Yes
Social networks and homophily	Institutional	Yes
Intersectional	Integrative	No
Hegemonic masculinity	Integrative	Yes

Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter, I assured you that there were many good reasons to do the hard work that mastering gender theories involves. You should now begin to consider how different theories of gender can work as lenses, drawing your attention to different aspects of your own life and assisting with the archaeological examination of gender in your particular biography. Hopefully, you've begun to ask yourself questions that are informed by these theories. Does gender feel like a trait or a disposition, something that's an integral part of your identity and the way you think about yourself? How does gender work differently in the different interactions in which you participate? Are the rules or underlying logic of the organizations to which you belong gendered in nature? As we discussed at the beginning, and as we learned through our discussion of intersectionality and integration, the goal is not to pick a winner among the many theories you'll learn; rather, the point is to use what you learn to develop your own unique way of understanding what gender is and what it means to you.

BIG QUESTIONS

- In this chapter, we discussed individual, interactional, and institutional theories. Which level makes the most sense to you in understanding gender, and why? Which level do you think is best at describing the way in which people in your society generally understand gender? Which level is most difficult to understand, and why?

- We discussed many theories of gender in this chapter, and we explored only those from a sociological perspective. Why do you think there are so many theories for explaining gender? Does the wide range of gender theories reflect how difficult gender is as a concept to understand, or does it say more about the group of people who study gender? Is it an advantage or disadvantage to those studying gender that so many different theories exist?

- In Chapter 1, you learned about sexual dimorphism and the ways in which gender theorists approach this question. How do the theories in this chapter deal with the question of sexual dimorphism? For each theory, does it seem to rest on the idea that there are two types of bodies, male and female? How important does a belief in objectively real sexes seem to each theory?

- Doing gender as a perspective has been used to explain the categories of social class and race as well as gender. Can any of the other theories in this chapter also be used to explain other categories of difference and inequality, such as race, social class, sexuality, and disability? Do some of the theories seem more flexible than others in being used to explain these other categories? Does this flexibility reflect a strength or weakness of the theory? Should we be able to develop one theory that explains all of these categories? What might that theory look like?

- One central issue raised in this chapter and in Chapter 1 is the diversity of experiences

with gender and whether it makes sense to focus our attention on gender when what it means to be gendered is so varied historically and cross-culturally. Is it worthwhile to discuss gender and assume there is something common about that concept across times and places, or are we focusing on a concept (gender) that has no real, consistent meaning?

GENDER EXERCISES

1. For each theory described in this chapter, identify how that perspective would answer the following questions: (a) What is gender? (b) Why does gender inequality exist? (c) What would be the best method for reducing gender inequality? Then think about what your own theory of gender would look like and how it would answer these three fundamental questions. Write a paragraph describing your own theory, and then explain how it could be used to explain a specific example of how gender matters in your own life.

2. Pick one or more of the theories described in this chapter. Then pick a scene from a favorite movie or episode from a television show that involves gender. How could you use this theory to explain the role of gender in that particular scene or episode?

3. Interview several friends, coworkers, or family members about their views on gender. Try to ask questions that help each of your interview respondents explain his or her own particular theory of gender. Then think about how each of the theories outlined by your interview respondents lines up with the theories discussed in this chapter. How does the particular identity of the people you interviewed seem to impact their own particular theory of gender? For example, do older people tend to have different theories of gender than younger people? Are women's and men's theories different? How do college students' theories compare with those of people in the workplace?

4. Make a list of the important aspects of what it means to you to be gendered, including how you think, whom you interact with and how, what you wear, what you do or don't do, and so on. For each item on the list, does this aspect of what it means to you to be gendered apply to every culture or time period? In other words, do you think any of the items on your list are universal (true for everyone in that gender category, everywhere, and in every time period), or are they all specific to your particular culture, time period, and social background? Are they true for people in different racial groups, different social classes, different sexualities, or different nationalities?

5. Try typing *feminist* and *feminism* into a news search engine. What kinds of articles and news stories do you find on these topics? Do feminists seem to be engaged in a great deal of activity, and what kinds of issues do feminists and feminist organizations seem to be focusing on? What does this suggest about the current state of feminism? Do you see evidence that feminism is entering or already in a fourth wave?

6. Interview a group of friends, coworkers, or family on their views about feminism. You might ask them what they think feminism is, whether they consider themselves a feminist, whether they think being a feminist is a good or bad thing, whom they know (personally or not) to be a feminist, and what they know about the history of the feminist movement or current feminist groups. What do their

answers tell you about the history of feminism and the current state of feminism? Why do people tend to identify or not identify as feminists? Do there seem to be differences in the way your interview respondents think about feminism based on their age or other factors (for example, education, race, social class)? How do their responses compare with what you read about feminism in this chapter?

7. The Women's March may be an important part of fourth-wave feminism, but some of the problems of inclusivity still linger. Did the Women's March take an intersectional approach? Do research online about the representation of diverse women among the organizers and participants. Were trans women included? Interview people who attended the initial Women's March or subsequent marches about the demographics of people at the march. Were women of color and working-class women represented?

TERMS

SUGGESTED READINGS

On Institutional Approaches

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organization. *Gender & Society, 4*(2), 139–158.

On Intersectionality

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