Gender as a Social Structure: Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries to Advance Science and Equality

Barbara J. Risman

Department of Sociology and
Department of Gender and Women's Studies
University of Illinois at Chicago

Abstract[1]

In this paper, I provide a historical narrative tracing the social scientific conceptualization of sex and gender through the 20th Century and until today. I suggest we have moved from conceptualizing sexual inequality as attributable to internalized sex roles to a consensus that

inequality gender stratification exists within social institutions as well. I offer my own theoretical model to advance the understanding of gender, *gender as a social structure*. My theoretical argument suggests we must integrate research on individual differences, social expectations in interaction and practice, and the cultural and organizational logics at the organizational and institutional levels. I argue that, rather than test theories against one another, a modern scientific view is to integrate levels of analysis. To illustrate the theory, I review three distinct research projects that have been framed by it: a study of intersexuality, a study of international labor migration, and a study of a social movement determined against accepting gays and lesbians. I end by suggesting that viewing *gender as a social structure* allows us to envision a utopian society in which feminists have helped to dismantle that structure and build a post-gender society.

1. Introduction

As an undergraduate in 1974, I wanted to write a paper on gender and violence, and I was told it was impossible, because there was no literature to review. And that was true. The field has virtually exploded since then. As women have moved into the academy, as we have become researchers, our standpoint has invaded the social sciences with ever increasing concern for missing knowledge about women and challenges to sexual inequality (England et al. 2007). As an American scholar, I see the many of the social sciences in this country becoming both feminized, and ever more feminist. Today, the Sex & Gender section of the American Sociological Association is one of the largest sections of the organization, and feminists hold both the presidency and vice presidency of the association in the year 2012. There is a strong and active presence of feminist scholarship in anthropology and psychology as well. History has been perhaps most transformed by feminist thought of

all the social sciences, with women's concern for everyday social life -as opposed to war and military victory- now front and center as the very core of social history (Stacey and Thorne 1985). And of course, Women and Gender Studies is by definition a feminist interdisciplinary enterprise.

We have seen a stark, almost revolutionary, change in the social scientific discourse about gender inequality. In the middle of the last Century, family sociologists (e.g. Parsons and Bales 1955; Zelditch 1955) described women's function as the «heart» of families who had male «heads» and psychologists (Kohlberg 1966; Bandura 1963) applied socialization theory to help shape girls into mothers and boys into men. Now, gender scholarship is nearly synonymous with feminist scholarship, as the most widely cited English language gender journal, *Gender & Society*, is published by the feminist sociological association, Sociologists for Women in Society. The birth of this journal, *AG*, speaks to the ever increasing importance of gender scholarship internationally.

Feminist scholarship has crossed boundaries from its earliest moments, ignoring the disciplinary silos that have constrained so much of academic inquiry. As women's and gender studies programs, institutes, and centers developed internationally, they have always been concerned with issues that spanned the psychological, economic, social and historical. As concern for women's representation across male-dominated sciences evolved, many of those centers expanded to include women in the biological sciences as well. Feminists have debated whether to mainstream our work into many different disciplines, or to create a new one of Gender and Women's Studies. It seems as if we have taken a «both/and» strategy, attempting to transform academic disciplines and creating one of our own.

A central focus of both crossing boundaries to create a gender studies field, and crossing boundaries by taking feminist scholarship back to disciplinary venues, is the theory and research that seeks to explain why inequality exists and how to change it. The study of sex and gender is a remarkable example of modernist science in action, with theories tested empirically, sometimes revised, sometimes jettisoned and new ones arising in a responsive cumulative fashion.

In this article, I provide a historical narrative tracing the conceptualization of sex and gender, and the explanation for women's status as it developed in the social sciences through the 20th Century, to the present. I argue we have moved from a conceptualization of sexual inequality attributable to internalized sex roles to a consensus that gender inequality is multi-dimensional and exists as a stratification system beyond socialized sex differences between women and men. I then offer my own integrative theoretical framework for advancing the understanding of gender, with particular attention to issues of inequality. To illustrate the theory, I review three distinct research projects, which use it and show how more accurate and deeper understanding can result by using my multi-level framework. I end by suggesting that viewing *gender as a social structure* allows us to envision a utopian society in which feminists have helped to dismantle that structure and built a post-gender society.

2. Starting with Sex Differences

The conceptualization of sex and gender took a feminist turn when psychologists (e.g. Bem 1981a, 1981b; Spence and Helmriech 1978) began to measure sex role attitudes using scales that had been embedded in personality and employment tests (Terman and Miles 1936). Such research presumed that sexual inequality could be studied usefully by learning how women and men internalized sex roles, even as these feminist writers were critical of the constraints that such socialized sex-roles created for women. These early studies assumed that masculinity and femininity were opposite ends of one dimension, and thus if a subject was «high» on femininity, she was necessarily, by measurement design, «low» on masculinity. What became clear, however, was that not all people fit into the measurement scheme (Locksley and Colten 1979; Pedhazur and Tetenbaum 1979; Edwards and Ashworth 1977). Bem offered a new conceptualization (Bem 1981, 1993) that has become the gold standard in the social sciences, now so taken-for-granted that Bem is no longer routinely cited when it is used. She discovered that masculinity and femininity were actually

two different personality dimensions; a person could rate highly on masculinity and also highly on femininity or highly on neither. Traditional women would be high on femininity and low on masculinity, and traditional men would be high on masculinity and low on femininity. An aggressive and agentic woman might be low on femininity and high on masculinity, or high on both masculinity and femininity. A transgender man might be high on masculinity and low on femininity, or perhaps high on both. The ground-breaking conceptual leap here is that there are two dimensions, masculinity and femininity, and they are not opposites of one another, and that neither dimension is presumptively tied to biological bodies.

Some of today's psychologists (e.g. Choi et al. 2008; Choi and Fuqua 2003; Hoffman and Borders 2001) go further, suggesting instead that personality concepts, once labeled «masculine», actually measure efficacy/agency/leadership and the personality concepts, once labeled «feminine», actually measure nurturance and empathy (See Gill, Stockard, Johnson, and Williams 1987 for the first formulation of this rhetorical critique). To further analytic clarity, and feminist goals, these psychologists argue we should no longer even use the terms masculinity and femininity because they linguistically tie personality traits to sex category.

Sociologists began to study sex roles as defined by psychologists, with focus on how differences between individual women and men were rooted in childhood socialization (Stockard and Johnson 1980; Weitzman 1979). They studied how babies assigned to the male category are encouraged to engage in masculine behaviors, offered boy-appropriate toys, rewarded for playing with them, and punished for acting in girlish ways, while babies assigned to the female category are encouraged to engage in feminine behaviors while being limited to girl-appropriate toys such as dolls and easy bake ovens (Weitzman et al. 1972). Sex role socialization theory suggested that children are rewarded for displaying gender appropriate behaviors. The internalized selves that result from endemic socialization, is what creates the illusion that gender is naturally occurring. This differs from earlier versions of sex role socialization within functionalist family sociology by its critical edge, presuming that female socialization disadvantaged girls (Lever 1974). Bem (1993) shows

clearly how children become cultural natives, as they internalize the belief in essential gender differences and androcentrism as young children. She suggests that gender schemas depend both on gender relations in contemporary society and the socialization practices of parents themselves. Such research and theory on individuals has been important since the beginning of social scientific attention to gender as «sex roles».

In 1978, Lopata and Thorne published a trailblazing article that critiqued the validity of sex role theory. They argued that sex-role theory tacitly accepted functionalist presumptions about the reality of differences between women and men. Lopata and Thorne suggested that the very rhetorical use of the language of «role» voids questions of power and privilege, insinuating a natural complementarity between the sexes. Would we ever use the language of «race roles» to explain the differential opportunities and constraints for whites and non-whites? As I have argued elsewhere (Risman, 1998, 2004), as has Lorber (1994), Ferree (1990) and Connell (1987), other conceptual and empirical problems with sex-role theory exist as well. Sex–role theory presumes a stability of behavior across setting and life-course that simply does not exist. Kimmel (2008) summarizes a widely held contemporary position when he writes that "[…] sex role theory overemphasizes the developmental decisiveness of early childhood as the moment that gender socialization happens (2008, 106)." As empirical evidence accumulated (see review by Lorber 1994) that inequality between women and men could not simply be attributed to socialized individual differences and choices, new theoretical approaches moved from margin to center.

3. Moving Beyond Gender as an Individual Trait

Two very different theoretical alternatives developed within a sociological framework to move the analysis of gender beyond a focus on individuals: 1) from those who worked in an interactionist and ethnomethodological tradition, derived a framework known as «doing gender», and 2) from those based in stratification literatures, came a new «structuralism». I

briefly discuss each of these and then move forward to a detailed discussion of my own theoretical framework, which integrates both of these with individualist theories as well.

3.1 Doing Gender Framework

At the same moment in history when Kanter and Epstein were developing structuralist explanations for gender inequality, the centrality of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology for understanding gender was developing on a parallel track, introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987) in their classic article «Doing Gender». West & Zimmerman argued that gender is something we do, not something we are, drawing attention to the ways in which behaviors are enforced, constrained, and policed during social interaction. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (2004, 1990) shares the focus on deconstruction of essentialism with West and Zimmerman, but differs on the ontological reality of the possibility of a self, outside the discursive realm (see Green 2007). While West & Zimmerman, as social scientists, presume a self exists, Butler, a philosopher and queer theorist, dismisses the possibility of even a temporary self outside of discourse. In Butler's queer theory, the self is more imaginary figment then constructed, even temporary, self- identity. Yet, both traditions converge on the conceptualization of gender as performance. The «doing gender» framework has become perhaps the most commonly used perspective in contemporary feminist discourse. A 2011 citation search indicates the West & Zimmerman article has been cited over 4500 times by May 2012.

Qualitative research in this tradition has provided a great deal of evidence that women and men do gender, but do so dramatically differently across time, space, ethnicity, and social institution. Connell (1995) shows that there are numerous «masculinities» that exist simultaneously, although privileged men perform the most rewarded form of hegemonic masculinity. Similarly, researchers have described a myriad of ways that girls and women do femininity, from «intensive mothering» (Lareau 2003; Hays 1998) to «femme» lesbians, appropriating traditional emphasized symbols of womanhood such as heels and hose (Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand 2003). Lorber's (1994) meta-review of gender research through

the 20th century provides a dazzling overview of the quantity of research showing how gender is performed and then institutionalized into society.

Acker (1992, 1990) transformed gender theorizing when she expanded a «doing gender» argument to organizations. Instead of gender-neutral organizations, she found gender deeply embedded in organizational structure. Acker (1990; 1992) argued the very definition of jobs and organizational hierarchies are gendered, constructed to advantage men or others who have no caretaking responsibilities. The work by Martin (2003) and Poggio (2006) highlight the «practice turn» (Poggio, 2006, p. 229) in gender studies and has added complexity to the interactionist tradition, particularly showing how workplace organizations situate gender in practice. Gherardi and Poggio (2007) further the study of gender in organizations with their research on how interactional dynamics change when the first woman enters a male-dominated and masculinized work setting. They find much evidence of the ways in which gender is practiced in organizations that pretend to be gender neutral.

While consensus exists that «doing gender» is ubiquitous, there has been recent criticism of what can count as evidence of «doing gender». Deutsch (2007) suggested that when researchers find unexpected behaviors, rather than question whether gender is being «undone», they simply claim to discover different femininities and masculinities. I (Risman, 2009) build on this critique by suggesting that the ubiquitous usage of «doing gender» creates conceptual confusion as we study a world that is indeed changing. We must know what we expect as gendered behavior and be willing and ready to admit it when we do not find it.

3.2 The New Structuralism

New structuralist analysis of gender was first used to understand apparent sex differences in workplace and family behavior. In her classic book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Kanter (1977) argued that apparent sex differences in leadership style represented women's disadvantaged organizational roles, not their personalities. Her research showed that workers who held positions with less formal power and fewer opportunities for mobility are less motivated and ambitious at work, less perceived to be leadership material, and more con-

trolling autocratic bosses when they do enter the ranks of management. Because women and men of color were then overwhelmingly in positions with limited power and opportunity, they are seen as inferior leaders. The evidence suggested that white men in positions with little upward mobility and low organizational power also fulfilled the stereotype of the micro-managing less-than-successful boss. In a study of life histories of baby boom American women, Gerson (1985) brought the new structuralism to gender issues in family life. She found that role preferences adolescent women were socialized to desire did not predict strategies for balancing work and family commitments among baby-boom Americans. Whether women «chose» domestic or work-focused lives was more often based on marital stability and success in the labor force then stable internalized personality traits or roles desired from their youth. In both work and family settings, the structural conditions of everyday life proved more important than feminine selves.

In a massive meta-analysis of the sex differences research on both public and private spheres, Epstein (1988) concluded that nearly all of the differences between men and women were the result of their social roles and societal expectations, and were really *Deceptive Distinctions* (Epstein 1988). Epstein argued, as did Kanter and Gerson before her, that if men and women were given the same opportunities and constraints, the differences between them would vanish.

More recent research in this structural tradition, however, has challenged aspects of the theory itself. Kanter provided strong evidence, as did others that women (and non-whites) are marginalized in white male occupations and work behaviors reflect their token positions (Epstein, 1988). When research expanded, however, to test the gender-neutral proposition that work behavior was primarily structurally determined, by studying men in female-dominated occupations, the evidence became far less convincing (Zimmer, 1988). When men were the minority group, they were not marginalized into less powerful positions with less mobility. Instead, men, at least white men, benefit from occupying a token status within female dominated occupations and ride glass escalators to the top (Williams 1992; Wingfield, 2009). Similarly, more recent on women and men's domestic work in families finds weak evidence that sex differences in workloads are deceptive distinctions. Nearly all such

research suggests that women continue to do more family labor then their husbands, even when they work outside the home as many hours per week and earn equivalent salaries (Bittman et al. 2003; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson 2000; Tichenor). Gender neutral structural theories do not receive empirical support when tested in complex ways within female as well as male dominated occupations and inside households.

3.3 Gender as a Social Structure (of Stratification)

Towards the end of the 20th Century, feminist theorists began to move beyond debating whether gender was best understood as internalized selves, role expectations, or organizational constraints, and began developing theories that encompassed what Collins (1990) describes as a both/and theory of science, multi-level theories for gender as sexual stratification system and not merely psychological characteristics of individuals (Butler 2004; Connell 1987; Ferree et al. 1998; Lorber 1994; Martin 2004). While there were a variety of such multi-disciplinary feminist frameworks developed (e.g. Connell 1987; Lorber 1994; Martin 2004), here, I outline my own conceptualization of *gender as a social structure* and argue for its usefulness as a guide for empirical research.

Gender is deeply embedded in our selves, the expectations we have for others, and in our cultural and organizational and legal systems, in complicated systematic and recursive ways. *Gender as a social structure,* creates inequality by differentiating opportunities and constraints based on sex category. In this theory I suggest that *gender as a social structure* has consequences on three dimensions (2004, 433): (1) at the individual level, for the development of gendered selves, identities, and personalities; (2) during interaction, as men and women face different cultural expectations even when they fill identical roles and positions; and (3) in institutional domains, including organizations, where explicit regulations and cultural beliefs regarding resource distribution and material goods are gender specific. We cannot fully understand a dimension, aspect, and/or consequence of gender without placing it into a larger multidimensional and integrative framework.

I depend upon Giddens' (1984) theory of «structuration» in my conceptualization of *gender as a structure* that creates stratification, emphasizing the recursive relationship be-

tween structure and individuals. Structuration incorporates the transformative power of human action. People create the social structure, but once it exists, it constrains action. Structure is the medium and the outcome of conduct which recursively organizes it. Actors are knowledgeable and reflexive, monitoring their actions, but doing to within taken-for-granted unacknowledged conditions. Action may turn against structure but can never escape it. In this theory for gender, I focus both on how structure shapes individual choice and constrains social interaction but also how people create, sustain, and modify the gender structure. Action itself may change the immediate or future context. It is this dynamic conceptualization of structure both created by, and constraining human action that is useful for conceptualizing *gender as a social structure*.

With this framework I cross disciplinary boundaries, with concern for the internationalization of gendered psychological identities and selves, the sociological importance of «doing gender» and gender as practice, and the organizational analysis of institutions. I focus both on behavior and cultural logics, which underlie gender expectations and support the formal rules and regulations at the institutional and organizational levels. As Gherardi (1995) argues, gender is symbolically embedded in organizational culture. Figure 1 displays this graphically.

In order to understand how gender stratification is produced and reproduced, and sometimes decreased, from generation to generation, we need understand the breadth and depth of the power of gender as a social structure. We should not test the alternative strength of individual selves versus cultural expectations or organizational design, in search of a primary cause of inequality. Rather, we learn more by approaching every empirical question with complexity, a concern for each level of analysis -the individual, the interactional and organizational.

Figure 1: Gender as a Social Structure
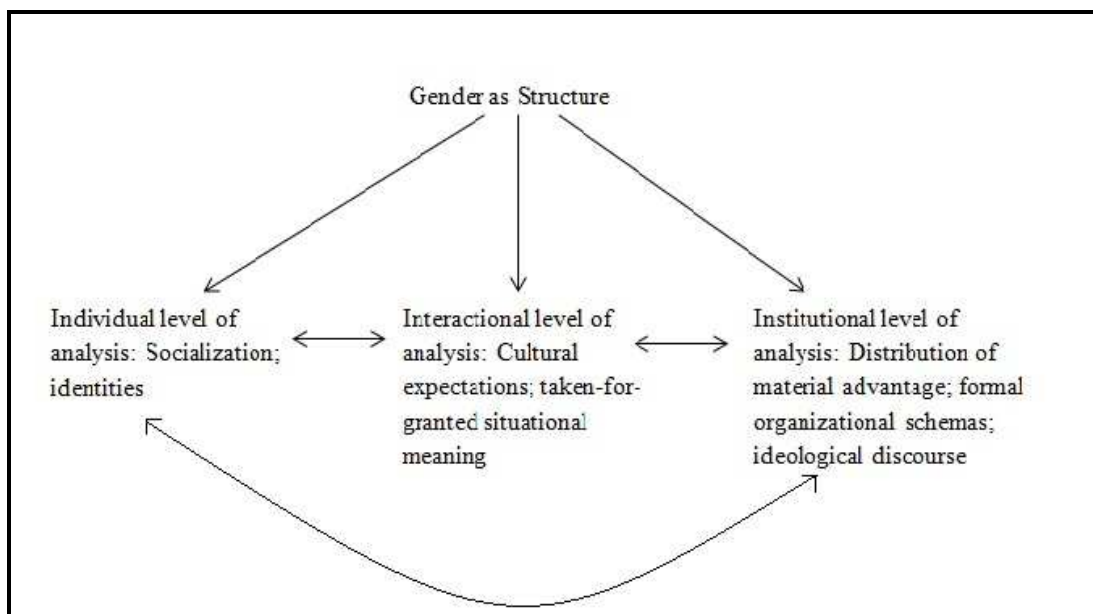
(Risman, 1998)

3.4 Individual Level of Analysis

When we are concerned with the means by which boys and girls come to have a preference to do gender, we should focus on how identities are constructed through early childhood development with explicit socialization and modeling, and how preferences become internalized. To the extent that women and men choose to do gender-typical behavior across social roles and over the life cycle, we must focus on such individual explanations. While much attention has been paid to gender socialization and the individualist presumptions for gender, I suggest that continued attention is necessary to the construction of the self, both the means by which socialization leads to internalized predispositions, and how once selves are adopted, people use identity work to maintain behaviors that bolster their sense of selves (Schwalbe et al. 2000). It is clearly the case that women and men internalize norms and become gendered cultural natives. The important lesson from the accumulation of research over the 20th century is not that culture is unimportant for individual selves, but that socialization and identity work alone do not explain all of gender stratification.

3.5 Interactional Level of Analysis

Gender also organizes the interactional expectations that every human being meets often in every moment of life. We «do gender» to meet the interactional expectations of those around us. Ridgeway and her colleagues (Ridgeway 1991, 2001, 2011; Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997; Ridgeway and Correll 2004) show convincingly that the status expectations attached to gender (and race) categories are cross-situational. In a sexist and racist society, women and all persons of color are expected to have less to contribute to task performances than are white men, unless they have some externally validated source of prestige or authority. Women are expected to be more empathetic and nurturing, men to be more efficacious and agentic. Such status expectations are one of the engines that re-create inequality even in novel situations where there is no other reason to expect male or white privilege to emerge. Status expectations create a cognitive bias toward privileging men with agency and women with nurturance (Ridgeway 2011). Cognitive bias of this sort helps to explain the reproduction of gender inequality in everyday life.

3.6 Institutional Level of Analysis

Gender structures social life not only by creating gendered selves and cultural expectations that shape interactions, but also by organizing social institutions and organizations. As Acker (1990) and Martin (2004) have shown, economic organizations embed gender meanings in the definition of jobs and positions. Any organization that presumes valued workers are available fifty weeks a year, at least forty hours a week, for decades on and presumes that such workers have no practical or moral responsibility for caretaking of anyone but themselves. The industrial and post-industrial economic structure presumes workers have wives, or do not need them.

In many societies, the legal system also presumes women and men have distinct rights and responsibilities. For example, some western governments allow for different retirement ages for women and men, thus building gender into legislative bureaucracy. Much has begun to change in Western democracies, as laws move toward gender-neutrality. And yet, even when the actual formal rules and regulations begin to change -whether by government,

courts, religion, higher education, or organizational rules- the cultural logic often remains, hiding patriarchy in gender-neutral formal law (Williams 2001). Andocentric cultural beliefs that justify different distributions of resources that privilege men, often outlive formal organizational rules and regulations.

4. From Theory to Research

The multidimensionality of gender structure theory has already begun to provide a useful framework for empirical research (Anderson, 2007; Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2009; Banerjee 2010; Davis 2011, 2009; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Robinson and Spivey, 2007). I illustrate the usefulness of conceptualizing *gender as a structure* by reviewing its application in three distinct research projects: an empirical study of intersexuality in American society, a study of transnational labor migration, and a study of a Christian social movement that attempts to change homosexual and lesbian identities to heterosexual ones - a social movement that calls itself, the «ex-gay» movement.

Our societal reaction to bodies that biologically disrupt the sex binary, those born intersexual, is a fascinating moving target. Davis (2011a) has followed the intersex rights movement that, in the 1990s, challenged the medical community's surgical treatment of intersexuality that left many feeling further stigmatized, scarred, and for some, a diminished or destroyed possibility for sexual sensation. In the 1990s, the radical slogan of the intersex rights movement was «hermaphrodites with attitude», reflecting an identity based social movement, and for a time pushed to change the acronym LGBT (meaning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) to LGBTI (adding Intersexuals) (Davis 2011c). In response to this social movement, the medical establishment changed it's protocol so that children born with gender variant bodies were no long automatically treated surgically or, as the movement activists called it, mutilated (Costello blog). Recently, however, the major social movement organization representing intersexuals, metaphorically closed it's doors in the summer of 2008 (by pulling down it's website), and reinvented itself as a non-profit whose

goal was to work the medical establishment to help those with «disorders of sex development» or «DSDs», for short (Davis 2011c). The radical identity-based social movement was jettisoned by it's major organizational player for the practical goal of working more effectively with doctors (Davis 2011c). Davis interviewed intersexual activists from a variety of organizations, their parents, and medical providers across America during this historical moment.

Davis (2011a) shows that to understand the changing context of intersexuality, you need to analyze individual identities, interactional expectations, and institutional and organizational dynamics and so illustrates the usefulness of a gender structure framework. She finds that medical experts advise parents to socialize their intersex children into a stereotypically defined gender identity, influenced by medical professionals' essentialist understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality (Davis 2011b). Many of the parents interviewed for her study wanted more than anything else for their intersex child to pass as «normal» which they believed could be accomplished through very stereotypical gender performances (Davis 2011a). Many medical professionals and parents use traditional gendered expectations to strategically help children fit into their socially assigned gender identities (Davis 2011 a, b). Medical professionals and parents commonly assessed one's sex assignment by the child's ability to pull off these stereotypical gender identities (Davis 2011 a, b), despite the fact that «normal» girls are freer than ever to play with their gender (Risman and Seale, 2010).

Infusing gender expectations with new theories of socially construction can have a seismic effect on individuals, sometimes leading them to re-define their own lives. Feminist ideas about the possibility of moving beyond a stereotypical gender stereotypes, even beyond a gender binary of male versus female, found in college classrooms or by reading feminist works by people such as Judith Butler (1990) or Fausto Sterling (1993), have proved liberating (Davis 2012). Indeed, the intersexuals who rejected the rhetorical shift from defining intersexual as an identity to those with a disorder of sex development (DSD), were those that had been exposed to feminist social constructionist theories, whether inside the ivory tower or outside of it. Intersexuals with identities less constrained by gender bina-

ries were more comfortable in their own skins, and less supportive of the new diagnostic nomenclature that describes them as disordered.

The organizational and institutional constraints created by the medical community are not to be dismissed lightly, however. While intersexuals who reject gender stereotypes and rebel against the gender structure might be more comfortable with their own bodies, those who adopt a gender stereotyped presentation of self, and accepted the notion of having a disorder of sexual development spoke of far more supportive relationships with their doctors and their parents. The institutional rules and regulations of the medical establishment enforce gendered expectations and welcome those who follow them. Davis has documented that exposure to feminist ideas, and expectations, seems to allow for an individual's agency to reject gender expectations even against doctor's advice. This research show that while gender structure constrains behavior, it is constantly evolving, and under negotiation. After all, a social movement of «hermaphrodites with attitudes» brought attention to the controversy about surgical treatment of intersexuality in the first place. Intersexuals used feminist social constructionist ideas to reject medical diagnosis of their bodies and create new expectations that allowed for wider behavioral repertoires, challenging gender stereotypes. They formed a social movement that actually changed medical protocol, creating a crack in the surgical enforcement of a gender binary. And yet, negotiation continues, and the movement wrestles with the re-medicalization of intersexuality as a disorder of sexual development. The outcome of this negotiation between changing gender expectations, individual identities, and the medical establishment remains unclear. We see a moment of flux in our gender structure as the complexities between the recursive and dynamic changes between individual, interactional and institutional levels reverberate.

Banerjee 's (2010, 2012) research into the experiences of Indian families in the United States similarly shows the power of the gender structure, especially as it is embedded in formal visa statuses and immigration law. Her research focuses on temporary workers who emigrate from India to the US on guest worker visas in professions for which there are not enough American citizens to fill the jobs. This study focuses on male tech professionals and female nurses. These workers are allowed to bring their «dependent spouses» but those

partners are not allowed to work, to apply for financial assistance to further their education, and in some states, are not even allowed to drive. Banerjee analyzes their experiences using Foucault's concept of governmentality (1984), where the consequences of regulatory systems are built into the expectations that affect personal life, and by extension, identities. While the definition of a spouse as a dependent derives directly from the notion of the modern industrial family with a male breadwinner, and female caretaker, it's imposition is gender-neutral in immigration law, providing a natural experiment to study the legal systems impact on female and male led immigrant families.

The expectations embedded in the guest work visa leave workers, both male high-tech professionals and female nurses, believing they must accede to their perceptions of employers expectations for more over-time and lesser working conditions then offered to citizen colleagues. The high tech workers, in particular, believe they are expected to give all their time to employers because those employers have paid for their «dependent spouse» to arrive in the U.S. and they believe employers expect the spouse to handle all family and household responsibilities. This creates an institutional pressure on the family, for the wife to take responsibility for household and reproductive (for those with children) labor, despite nearly all of them being highly educated and having had professional positions in India. The wives of high-tech workers do not hold traditional gender identities, do not necessarily find fulfillment in domesticity, but rather bristle at their «vegetable visas» which do not allow them to work for pay and stall their professional careers, sometimes for years. The husbands on dependent spouse visas are far less articulate, with no feminist ideology available to them to critique their status. The institutional visa regulations do indeed mold gender expectations, to some degree, as they become primary caretakers of their children. But gender identities trump structural conditions as most do not take over the household labor of cooking or cleaning. The gender structure, the expectations attached to masculinity, weighs heavily against their willingness to adopt identities of dependent spouses and provide domestic service to their breadwinning wives. Banerjee uses Foucault's concept of governmentality (1984) to explain how the power of the visa laws extends to the expectations couples have for each other, but far less effectively to the adoption of identities as «house-

wives» for either women or men. This research provides far more complicated understanding of international migration and its impact on family life because of it's attention to the level of individual gender identities, family role expectations, and the gendered presumption embedded in visa law.

Robinson and Spivey's research designed explicitly within a gender structure theoretical framework, examine the strategies used by a Christian movement to try to create «ex-gays». Their textual analysis shows that gender ideology is one of this antifeminist movements most potent resource, particularly masculinity politics (e.g. Messner, 1998), as it is imposed on individuals, embedded into cultural expectations, and organizational rules. At the individual level, the ex-gay social movement frames mothers as responsible for producing sons with gender deficits that lead to homosexuality. At the interactional level, the movement seeks to re-socialize men by teaching them the «performative» (Butler, 1990) aspect of gender, teaching them to «do masculinity» as a method to discover heterosexual desire. The movement claims to heal homosexual men by creating the expectation that they become more masculine in their mannerism and activities, including marrying a woman. The ex-gay movement also aspires to structure the social order to reinforce male power and privilege, both in the material and cultural spheres by sponsoring pro-family public policy and proliferating Evangelical right-wing Christian organizations around the world. The pro-family politics emphasize the restoration of earlier versions of masculinity, men's rights and the resistance to feminist social change. The ideology is based upon the belief that gender confusion, including women's rights, has led to increasing homosexuality, seen as a social problem such as poverty, single parenthood, and family disorder. This social movement, born in the U.S., is engendering a global movement with 4000 facilities in more than 150 different countries worldwide trying to influence global culture. In this research, attention to the individual, interactional, and institutional levels of analysis shows how one social movement is attempting to change the gender structure that now exists by returning it to one even more patriarchal, and less gay friendly.

5. From Research to Feminist Utopian Vision

If gender as a social structure supports inequality by differentiating opportunity and constraints based on sex category, then the local implication is that to eliminate inequality we must eliminate the gender structure. How does one begin to dismantle gender as a social structure? Connell (1987) argued that change is uneven and contradictions arise that can become crisis tendencies that further de-stabilize the gender system. Each of the research projects discussed above illustrate historical moments of crises tendencies in contemporary gender structures.

The social movement that sprang up to criticize medical treatment of intersexual infants used, was framed from its inception with feminist critiques of gender structure, especially the social construction of boys and girls as opposites. The opposition to shoehorning babies into male or female categories at birth was at core a rebellion against contemporary gender structure, and the re-medicalization movement can be analyzed as institutional push-back to support the status quo gender structure. The contemporary conflict and disagreement is a perfect illustration that it is possible, if not easy, to rebel against contemporary gender structures and change them. Some intersexuals now carry identities that are not gender-typical, and continue to change expectations for one another, and try to influence the institutional level medical establishment. The utopian goal here is to allow babies born between the gender binary to establish identities that fit, rather than are assigned, to encourage doctors and parents to disentangle expected behavior and personality traits from gender stereotypes and thus not to use gendered expectations to measure success for their children and patients. In addition, their utopian goal is to change the medical view that those human beings born between gender categories are necessarily diseased, but instead can be accepted as a normal variation of humanity. Whether the movement activists frame their hopes and dreams as moving toward a utopian post-gender society, I suggest they are helping to move us in that direction.

Similarly, the social movement to try to turn gay men and lesbians into «ex-gay» is also explicitly attempting to change the contemporary gender system. In their view, a utopian world is one from the past, where men are heads of households, and sexuality is confined to heterosexual marital relations. They do, however, agree with a sociological proposition that it is possible to change the gender structure, even if they propose to change it in anti-feminist directions. I suggest that if a utopian goal is social justice and equality, then the gender structure needs to be dismantled rather than renovated to an earlier mythical glorious moment, in which white straight males had more privilege then they do today.

There is no social movement, of note, to change the ways in which the gender structure is embedded into the U.S. immigration laws. Even now that some of the dependent spouses are men, the implicit presumption built into guest worker visas is that workers have domestic partners who should not work, and indeed are legally barred from employment. In a utopian post-gender world, government power would not be used to impose family patterns based on traditional patriarchal norms on today's workers, whether they are «guests» in the United States, or not.

When we broaden out gaze, to other research, we do see other changes beginning to happen, crises tendencies beginning to crack our contemporary gender structure. Girls and women, as subordinates in the gender structure, are allowed, even encouraged, to strive for what used to be solely the province of men. Feminist-inspired changes in female socialization has no doubt changed young women's lives. They are now encouraged to play sports, to develop their muscles, to compete with boys in school, and they are doing all of these things enthusiastically (Messner 2002). The pipeline for girls moving into math and science, while not clear, is not nearly as clogged as it used to be (Dean 2006; Fox 2011). Young women now outnumber men in colleges, and are reaching parity in U.S. graduate education, far surpassing men in doctorates in traditionally women's fields (England et al. 2007). But similar transformations are not yet happening for boys. Boys are not encouraged to develop traditionally feminine skills of empathy or nurturance with doll play, nor allowed much freedom to decorate themselves in what is considered a feminine fashion (see *Sociological Images* 2011). While women are free to move into men's occupations (at least

middle class ones, see England 2010), few men choose to enter traditionally less well-paid women's jobs.

Boys and men, however, are not similarly encouraged, nor even allowed, to move into the province of what was feminine. This imbalance exists because the gender structure is a stratification system, and social movements are unlikely to emerge to convince the privileged to move into less-valued roles. Feminist-inspired social change has begun to erode the belief that only boys can be agentic and effective (Ridgeway 2011). But the cultural expectations and powerful socialization that defines only girls as empathic and responsible for caring work has yet to change. This imbalance in the changing nature of gender expectations for boys and girls signals a possible crack in the gender structure, as many of them will work and eventually live together.

Crisis tendencies in gender, however, are most definitely not limited to or even primarily about changing competition and division of labor between men and women. The increasing visibility of lesbians and gay men in every aspect of cultural representation also destabilizes gender relations. Heterosexuality is deeply embedded in hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, and heteronormativity (the expectation of heterosexuality) is a building block of the gender structure (Ingraham 2006; Jackson 2003, 2006). Gay couples cast doubt on the culture of taken-for-granted heteronormativity and its gendered definitions of men and women. Young people are also disrupting norms about the gender binary itself, as some are publicly chafing at the confinement to the gender structure and demanding the freedom to be queer not just in their sexuality, but in their gender as well. While there is very little research on genderqueer youth (but see Factor and Rothblum 2008, and Shotwell and Sangrey 2009) and the reports about them are primarily journalistic (Conlin 2011), their presence and their demands are being felt internationally. Every day more blogs are written by people identifying as genderqueer[2] and/or transgender[3]. High school students are

---

[2] See e.g. Androgyne, GenderQueerView, GenderQueerRevolution, SBearBergman, SexGenderBody.

[3] See e.g. GenderQueerView, NixWilliams, QuestioningTransphobia, RadNichole, Tranifesto, Trans-Fusion (Costello 2011).

requesting the right to choose their own pronoun, college students are demanding gender-free bathrooms and dormitories, and Australia now offers passports with an «other» category. The issue at hand is the rejection of the expectations that belong to the status of «-woman» or «-man». This is new.

To move to a world beyond gender, we need to pay attention to changing the gender structure at every level, the individual, the interactional, and the institutional. There are revolutionary actors at the individual level, defying gender restrictions in their goal to be accepted as who they want to be. Swedish elementary schools that avoid using gendered pronouns entirely (Hebblethwaite 2011) are taking another step in the right direction. At the level of interactional expectations, we must first accept and support individuals who try to undo gender accepting boys who like nail polish, and girls who choose combat military careers. We must stop imputing sexual identity from gender performances, presuming nurturing and artsy men are gay, or that tough women without make-up are lesbians. Ridgeway and Correll (2000) suggest that one way to beat these cognitive stereotypes is to consciously create situations where women are clearly effective task leader (see also Ridgeway 2006). In workplaces, this means insuring that leadership teams include women in non-traditional roles, leading men as well as other women. My colleagues and I suggest, in a similar vein, we ought to expect men to have a moral responsibility for caretaking. When men do not carry equal work in the family, we should consider them immoral actors, and use the power of interactional expectations to help create equality of caregiving. More research is needed to understand when and how interactional strategies, including shame, can effectively change expectations instead of reinforcing them.

Perhaps the most political and therefore difficult strategies are at the macro/institutional level - changing structures and cultures of institutions. At the organizational level, formal rules and regulations must be gender neutral, but beyond that, we must change norms so that gender-neutral rules are no longer undercut by antiquated gender logics. The division of human labor into earner versus caregiver is an invention of an industrial era now behind us. To move toward a world where earning a full-time paycheck is not incompatible with

caring for other human beings requires us to move beyond dividing human beings into categories based on genitalia and dropping all the presumptions that go with such categories.

Feminist strategies cannot be fast nor revolutionary because gender is too close to home, a source of comfort to many (although it brings pain to some). Every act of resistance to the gender structure creates another crack; it helps shatter the current taken-for-granted reality. Every genderqueer teenager, every househusband, every gay couple that marries, every truly equal mother and father are like drops of water helping to move mountains of tradition (Sullivan 2007). Individuals alone are not likely to make structural changes, but with the collective support of others, they may succeed with breaks from gendered social norms. People can undo gender in their private lives as well as do it. They cannot only think the impossible, but act on it by themselves and by supporting others who rebel against the gender structure itself.

For permanent change, institutions and their cultural meaning systems have to be transformed by a vision of gender neutrality. To degender institutions, feminists need to inhabit them from the bottom up, and move up the ranks so they can be reformed from the top down.

Utopian strategies need to be wide-ranging and for the long-term. The feminist project to move beyond gender needs to envision a multi-generational strategy that seeks to create a better world for the future. My utopian vision for gender equality asks feminists to continue the social movement towards what may seem like an impossible dream -a world where people are not forced to live constrained inside one gender, where expectations for interaction are not based on gender identity, and where work and family are organized to combine productive paid work with the unpaid work of social reproduction. While it is true that most can hardly imagine a society with such freedom, I charge feminists academics to help create such a vision, to help free the imagination. Twentieth Century feminism fought hard, and often successfully, for women's rights. The 21st Century movement we envision goes far beyond that -we imagine a world beyond gender.

REFERENCES

Acker, J. (1990), *Hierarchies, jobs, and bodies: A theory of gendered organizations*, in «*Gender & Society»,* Vol.*4*, n. 2, pp. 139-158.

Anderson, K. L. (2007), *Who Gets Out? Gender as Structure and the Dissolution of Violent Heterosexual Relationships*, in «*Gender & Society*», Vol, 21, n. 22, pp. 173-201.

Armstrong, E. A., Hamilton L. and Sweeney B. (2006) *Sexual Assault on Campus: A Multilevel, Integrative Approach to Party Rape*, in «*Social problems»,* Vol. 53, n. 4, pp. 83-99.

Banerjee, P. (2012), *Manufacturing Dependence and Politics of Dependent Visas*, Presented at the I.N.T.E.G.R.A.T.I.O.N 2.0 Conference, Organized by Boeckler Group at Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences, Bremen, Germany, February.

Banerjee, P. (2010), *Vegetable Visa: Gender in Families of Immigrating Indian Professionals With One Spouse on Dependent Visa*, Presented in the Regular Session on Immigration, Family and The Politics of Home and Belonging at Section on Asians and Asian Americans, at the *Annual Meeting of American Sociological Association*, Atlanta.

Bem, S. L. (1981), *Gender Schema Theory: A Cognitive Account of Sex Typing Source*, in «*Psycological Review*», Vol. 88, p. 354.

Bem, S.L. (1981), *The BSRI and Gender Schema Theory: A Reply to Spence and Helmreich*, in «*Psycological Review»,* Vol. 88, pp. 369-371.

Bem, S.L. (1993), *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality,* New Haven,Yale University Press.

Butler, J. (2004), *Undoing Gender*, New York, Routledge.

Collins, P. H. (1990), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Boston, Unwin Hyman.

Conlin, J. (2011), *The Freedom to Choose Your Pronoun*, in "New York Times", September 30. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/fashion/choosing-a-pronoun-he-she-or-

other-after-curfew.html?emc=eta1

Connell, R. W. (1987), *Gender and Power,* Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Connell, R.W. (1995), *Masculinities,* Berkeley, University of California Press.

Connell, R.W. (2003), *Developing a theory of gender as practice: Notes on Yancey Martin's Feminist Lecture*, in «*Gender & Society*», Vol. 17, n. 3, pp. 370-372.

Correll, S. J. (2001), *Gender and the Career Choice Process: The Role of Biased Self Assessments*, in «*American Journal of Sociology*,* Vol. 106:1691-1730.

Correll, S. J. (2004), *Constraints into Preferences: Gender, Status, and Emerging Career Aspirations*, in «*American Sociological Review*», Vol. 69:93-113.

Correll, S. J., Stephen B., and In P. (2007), *Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?*, in «*American Journal of Sociology*», Vol. 112:1297- 1338.

Costello, C. Y. (2004), "Cosmetic Genital Surgery Performed Upon Children", in Perrucci R., Ferraro K., Miller J. A., Rodriguez Rust P. C. (eds.), *Solutions: Agenda for Social Justice 2004*, Tenn. Society for the Study of Social Problems, pp. 81-86.

Costello, C. G. (2011), *Genderqueer Individuals and the Trans Umbrella*, http://trans-fusion.blogspot.com/2011/10/genderqueer-individuals-and-trans.html.

Cotter, David A., Joan M. Hermsen, and Reeve Vanneman (2004), *Gender Inequality at Work*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.

Crawley, S. L., Foley L. J., and Shehan C. L. (2008), *Gendering Bodies*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield.

Currah, Paisley, and Shannon Minter (eds.) (2004), *Transgender Rights: Culture, Politics, and Law,* Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press.

Davis, G. (2012 Forthcoming), "Bringing Intersexy Back'? Intersexuals and Sexual Pleasure", in (M Stombler, D. Baunach, E. Burgess, P. Donnelly, W. Simonds, E. Windsor, eds) *Sex Matters: The Sexualities and Society Reader*. 4th ed., New York, Allyn & Bacon.

Davis, G. (2011a), *Gender Players and Gender Prisoners: When Intersex Activism Medical Authority, and Terminology Collide*, Dissertation at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Davis, G. (2011b), "DSD is a Perfectly Fine Term: Reasserting Medical Authority through a Shift in Intersex Terminology" in McGann P. and Hutson D. (eds) *Sociology of Diagnosis*, (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishers.

Davis, G. (2011c), *From Collective Confrontation to Contested Collaboration: A Divided Intersex Rights Movement*, Presentation at Midwest Sociological Society, St. Louis, MO.

Dean, C. (2006), *Women in Science: The Battle Moves to the Trenches*, in "New York Times", December 19.

Deutsch, F. M. (2007), *Undoing Gender*, in «*Gender & Society*», Vol. 21:106-127)

England, P. (2010), *The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled*, in «*Gender & Society*», Vol. 24, p. 149.

England, P., Allison P., Li S., Mark N., Thompson J., Budig M. J., and Sun H. (2007), *Why Are Some Academic Fields Tipping Toward Female? The Sex Composition of U.S. Fields of Doctoral Degree Receipt, 1971–2002*, in «*Sociology of Education*», Vol. 80, p. 23.

Epstein, C. F. (1990), *Deceptive Distinctions: Sex, Gender, and the Social Order*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Factor, R. J. and Rothblum E. (2008), *Exploring Gender Identity and Community Among Three Groups of Transgender Individuals in the United States: MTFs, FTMs, and Genderqueers* in «*Health Sociology Review»,* Vol. 17, p. 235.

Fausto-Sterling, A. (1993), *The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are not Enough*, in «*The Sciences»,* March/April, pp. 20-25.

Foucault, M. (1991), "Governmentality", Pp. 87-104 in Burchell G., Gordon C. and Miller P. (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, pp. 87-104.

Fox, M. F., Sonnert G., and Nikiforova I. (2011), *Programs for Undergraduate Women in Science and Engineering: Issues, Problems, and Solutions*, in «*Gender & Society*», in Vol. 25, p. 589.

Gerson, K. (1985), *Hard Choices: How Women Decide About Work, Career, and Motherhood*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Gherardi, S. (1995), *Gender, Symbolism and Organizational Cultures*, London, Sage.

Gherardi, S. and Poggio B. (2007), *Gendertelling in Organizations: Narratives from Male-Dominated Environments*, Copenhagen, Copenhagen Business School Press.

Gill, S., Stockard J., Johnson M., and Williams S. (1987), *Measuring Gender Differences: The Expressive Dimension and Critique of Androgyny Scales*," *Sex Roles* 17: 375-400.

Hebblethwaite, C. (2011), *Sweden's "Gender-Neutral" Preschool*
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14038419.

Jacobs, J. A., and Gerson K. (2004), *The Time Divide: Work, Family, and Gender Inequality,* Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Kanter, R. M. (1977), *Men and Women of the Corporation,* New York, Basic Books.

Ingraham, C. (2006), "Thinking Straight, Acting Bent: Heteronormativity and Homosexuality", in Davis K., Evans M., and Lorber J., (eds.), *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies*, London, Sage.

Jackson, S. (2003), "Heterosexuality, Heteronormativity and Gender Hierarchy: Some Reflections on Recent Debates", in Weeks J., Holland J., and Waites M., (eds.), *Sexualities and Society: A Reader*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press.

Jackson, S. (2006), *Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and Limits) of Heteronormativity*", in «*Feminist Theory*,* Vol. 7, pp. 105–121.

Lopata, H. Z., and Thorne B. (1978), *On the Term "Sex Roles",* in «*Signs*», Vol. 3, n. 3, pp. 718-721.

Lorber, J. (1994), *Paradoxes of gender*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Martin, P. Y. (2003), *Said and Done vs. Saying and Doing: Gender Practices/Practicing Gender and Work*, in «*Gender & Society*», Vol. 17(3): pp.342-366.

Messner, M. A. (2002), *Taking the Field: Women, Men and Sports,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Poggio, B. (2006), *Outline of a Theory of Gender Practices*, in «*Gender Work and Organization*», Vol. 13, N. 3, pp. 226-233.

Ridgeway, C. (1991), *The Social Construction of Status Value: Gender and Other Nominal Characteristics*, in «*Social Forces*», 70, pp. 367-386.

Ridgeway, C. (2001), *Gender, Status, and Leadership*, in «*Journal of Social Issues*», Vol. 57 (4), pp. 637-655.

Ridgeway, C. (2006), "Gender as an Organizing Force in Social Relations: Implications for the Future of Inequality," (eds.) Blau F., Brinton M. C., and Grusky D. B., in *The Declining Significance of Gender*, New York, Russell Sage, pp. 263-287.

Ridgeway, C. (2011), *Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World,* New York, Oxford.

Ridgeway, C., and Balkwell J. (1997), *Group Processes and the Diffusion of Status Value Beliefs*, in. «*Social Psycology Quarterly*», 60, pp. 14-31.

Ridgeway, C. L. and Correll S. J. (2000), *Limiting inequality through interaction: The end(s) of gender*, in «*Contemporary Sociology*», *29,* pp.110-120.

Ridgeway, C. (2004), *Unpacking the gender system: A theoretical perspective on gender beliefs and social relations*, in «*Gender & Society*», *18*(4), pp. 510-531.

Risman, B. J. (1998), *Gender Vertigo: American Families in Transition*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.

Risman, B. J. (2004), *Gender as social structure: Theory wrestling with activism*, in «*Gender & Society*», *18*(4), pp. 429–450.

Risman, B. J. and Seale E. (2010), "Betwixt and Between: Gender Contradictions among Middle Schoolers," in Risman B. J. (ed.) *Families as they Really Are*, New York, Norton Publishers, pp. 340-361.

Robinson, C. M. and Spivey S. E. (2007), *The Politics of Masculinity and the Ex-Gay Movement*, «*Gender & Society*», 21(5), pp. 650-675.

Schwalbe, M., Godwin S., Holden D., Schrock D., Thompson S., and Wolkomir M. (2000), *Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis*, in «*Social Forces*, 79(2), pp. 419-452.

Shotwell, A. and Sangrey T. (2009), *Resisting Definition: Gendering through Interaction and Relational Selfhood*, in «*Hypatia*, 24, p. 56.

Spence, J.T., & Helmreich, R.L. (1978), *Masculinity and Femininity: Their Psychological Dimensions, Correlates, and Antecedents*, Austin, University of Texas Press.

Stacey, J., and Thorne B. (1995), *The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology*, in «*Social Problems*, Vol. 32(4): 301-316.

Sullivan, O. (2007), *Changing Gender Relations, Changing Families : Tracing the Pace of Change Over Time,* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

West, C. and Zimmerman D. (1987), *Doing gender*, «*Gender & Society*, *9*, pp. 8-37.

Williams, C. L. (1992), *The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the 'Female' Professions*, in «*Social Problems*, 39, pp. 253–267.

Wingfield, A. H. (2009), *Racializing the Glass Escalator: Reconsidering Men's Experiences with Women's Work*, in «*Gender & Society*», 23, pp. 5-26.

Zimmer, L. (1988), *Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender Neutral Theory*, in «*Social problems*, 35, pp. 64-77.