

THE PRISM OF GENDER

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In the metaphorical kaleidoscope of this book, gender is the pivotal prism. It is central to the intricate patterning of social life and encompasses power relations, the division of labor, symbolic forms, and emotional relations (Connell, 2000). The shape and texture of people's lives are affected in profound ways by the prism of gender as it operates in their social worlds. Indeed, our ways of thinking about and experiencing gender, and the related categories of sex and sexuality, originate in our society. As we noted in the introduction to this book, gender is very complex. In part, the complexity of the prism of gender in North American culture derives from the fact that it is characterized by a marked contradiction between people's beliefs about gender and real behavior. Our real behavior is far more flexible, adaptable, and malleable than our beliefs would have it. To put it another way, contrary to the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, there are no gender certainties or absolutes. Real people behave in feminine, masculine, and nongendered ways as they respond to situational demands and contingencies (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Pfeffer, 2014; Tavis, 1992).

To help us think more clearly about the complexity of gender, two questions are addressed in this chapter: (1) How does Western, i.e., Euro-American, culture condition us to think about gender, especially in relation to sex and sexuality? (2) How does social scientific research challenge Western beliefs about gender, sex, and sexuality?

WESTERN BELIEFS ABOUT GENDER, SEX, AND SEXUALITY

Most people in contemporary Western cultures, such as the United States, grow up learning that there are two and only two sexes, male and female; two and only two genders, feminine and masculine; and two and only two sexualities, heterosexual and homosexual (Bem, 1993; Budgeon, 2014; Lucal, 2008; Pfeffer, 2014; Wharton, 2005). We are taught that a real woman is female-bodied, feminine, and heterosexual; a real man is male-bodied, masculine, and heterosexual; and any deviation or variation is strange, unnatural, and potentially dangerous. Most people also learn that femininity and masculinity flow from biological sex characteristics (e.g., hormones, secondary sex characteristics, external and internal genitalia). We are taught that testosterone, a beard, big muscles, and a penis make a man, while estrogen, breasts, hairless legs, and a vagina make a woman. Many of us never question what we have learned about sex and gender, so we go through life assuming that gender is a relatively simple matter: A person who wears lipstick, high-heeled shoes, and a skirt is a feminine female, while a person who plays rugby, belches in public, and walks with a swagger is a masculine male (Lorber, 1994; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

The readings we have selected for this chapter reflect a growing body of social scientific research that challenges and alters the Western view of sex, gender, and sexuality. Overall, the readings are critical of the American tendency to explain virtually every human behavior in individual and biological terms. Americans overemphasize

biology and underestimate the power of social facts to explain sex, sexuality, and gender (Connell, n.d.; O'Brien, 1999). For instance, Americans tend to equate aggression with biological maleness and vulnerability with femaleness; natural facility in physics with masculinity and natural facility in child care with femininity; lace and ribbons with girliness and rough-and-tumble play with boyiness (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These notions of natural sex, gender, and sexuality difference, opposition, and inequality (i.e., a consistently higher valuation of masculinity than femininity) permeate our thinking, color our labeling of people and things in our environment, and affect our practical actions (Bem, 1993; Haines, Deaux, & Lofaro, 2016; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Wharton, 2005).

We refer to the American two-and-only-two sex/gender/sexuality system as the “pink and blue syndrome” (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). This syndrome is deeply lodged in our minds and feelings and is reinforced through everyday talk, performance, and experience. It’s everywhere. Any place, object, discourse, or practice can be gendered. Children’s birthday cards come in pink and blue. Authors of popular books assert that men and women are from different planets. People love PMS and alpha-male jokes. In “The Pink Dragon Is Female” (see Chapter 5), Adie Nelson’s research reveals that even children’s fantasy costumes are predictably gendered as masculine or feminine. The “pink and blue syndrome” is so embedded within our culture and, consequently, within individual patterns of thinking and feeling that most of us cannot remember when we learned gender stereotypes and expectations or came to think about sex, gender, and sexuality as natural, immutable, and fixed. It all seems so simple and natural. But is it?

What is gender? What is sex? What is sexuality? How are gender, sex, and sexuality related? Why do most people in our society believe in the “pink and blue syndrome”? Why do so many of us attribute one set of talents, temperaments, skills, and behaviors to women and another, opposing set to men? These are the kinds of questions social scientists have been asking and researching for well over 50 years. Thanks to the good work of an array of scientists, we now understand that gender, sex, and sexuality are not so simple. Social scientists have discovered that the gender landscape is complicated, shifting, and contradictory. Among the beliefs called into question by research are

- the notion that there are two and only two sexes, two and only two genders, and two and only two sexualities;

- the assumption that the two-and-only-two system is universal; and
- the belief that nature, rather than nurture, causes the “pink and blue syndrome.”

USING OUR SOCIOLOGICAL RADAR

Before we look at how social scientists answer questions such as, “What is gender?” let’s do a little research of our own. Try the following: Relax, turn on your sociological radar, and examine yourself and the people you know carefully. Do all the men you know fit the ideal of masculinity all the time, in all relationships, and in all situations? Do all the women in your life consistently behave in stereotypical feminine fashion? Do you always fit into one as opposed to the other culturally approved gender category? Or are most of the people you know capable of “doing” both masculinity and femininity, depending on the interactional context? If we allow ourselves to think and see outside the contemporary American cultural framework, we will observe that none of the people we know are aggressive all the time, nurturing all the time, sweet and submissive all the time, or strong and silent all the time. Thankfully, we are complex and creative. We stretch and grow and develop as we meet the challenges, constraints, and opportunities of different and new situations and life circumstances. Men can do mothering; women can “take care of business.” Real people are not stereotypes.

Yet even in the face of real gender fluidity, variation, and complexity, the belief in sex/gender/sexuality dichotomy, opposition, and inequality continues to dominate almost every aspect of the social worlds we inhabit. For example, recent research shows that even though men’s and women’s roles have changed and blended, the tendency of Americans to categorize and stereotype people based on the simple male/female dichotomy persists (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Haines, Deaux, & Lofaro, 2016; Miller, Eagly, & Linn, 2014; Shields, Garner, Di Leone, & Hadley, 2006; Snyder, 2014). As Peter Glick and Susan Tufts Fiske (1999) put it, “We typically categorize people by sex effortlessly, even nonconsciously, with diverse and profound effects on social interactions” (p. 368). To reiterate, many Americans perceive humankind as divided into mutually exclusive, nonoverlapping groups: males/masculine/men and females/feminine/women (Bem, 1993; Lucal, 2008; Wharton, 2005). This perception is shored up by the belief that

heterosexuality or sexual attraction between the two, and only two, sexes/genders is natural. *Heteronormativity* (see Chapter 6 for detailed discussion) is now the term commonly used by sociologists to refer to the “cultural, legal, and institutional practices” that maintain a binary and unequal system (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 441). The culturally created model of gender, as well as sex and sexuality, then, is nonkaleidoscopic: no spontaneity, no ambiguity, no complexity, no diversity, no surprises, no elasticity, and no unfolding growth.

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

Modern social science offers a rich and complex understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality. It opens the door to the diversity of human experience and rejects the tendency to reduce human behavior to simple, single-factor explanations. Research shows that the behavior of people, no matter who they are, depends on time and place, context and situation—not on fixed sex/gender/sexuality differences (Lorber, 1994; Tavis, 1992; Vespa, 2009). For example, just a few decades ago in the United States, cheerleading was a men’s sport because it was considered too rigorous for women (Dowling, 2000), women were thought to lack the cognitive and emotional “stuff” to pilot flights into space, and medicine and law were viewed as too intellectually demanding for women. As Carol Tavis (1992) says, research demonstrates that perceived gender differences turn out to be a matter of “now you see them, now you don’t” (p. 288).

If we expand our sociological examination of sex/gender/sexuality to include cross-cultural studies, the real-life fluidity of human experience comes fully alive (see Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion). In some cultures (e.g., the Aka hunter-gatherers), fathers as well as mothers suckle infants (Hewlett, 2001). In other cultures, such as the Agta Negritos, women as well as men are hunters (Estioko-Griffin & Griffin, 2001). Among the Tharus of India and Nepal, marriage is “woman-friendly” and women readily divorce husbands because each woman “enjoys a more dominant position and can find another husband more easily” (Verma, 2009, para. 14). As Serena Nanda discusses in depth in her reading in this chapter, extraordinary gender diversity was expressed in complex, more-than-two sex/gender/sexuality systems in many precontact Native American societies.

In addition, the complex nature of sex/gender/sexuality is underscored by scholarship on multiple masculinities and femininities, as discussed in the introduction to this book. There is no single pattern of masculinity or femininity. Masculinities and femininities are constantly in flux (Coles, 2009). Recall that Raewyn Connell (2000), in her analysis of masculinities, argued that hegemonic masculinity produces complicit, marginalized, and subordinated masculinities. Similarly, there is no femininity, singular. Instead, the ideal and practice of femininity vary by class, race, sexuality, historical period, nation, and other social factors. In her reading in this chapter, Connell extends analysis of masculinities by critiquing Eurocentric assumptions about gender relations with a focus on the relation between hegemony and masculinity through eras of decolonization, postcolonial development, and neoliberal globalization. Let’s use sociological radar again and call on the work of social scientists to help us think more precisely and “objectively” about what gender, sex, and sexuality are. It has become somewhat commonplace to distinguish between gender and sex by viewing sex, femaleness and maleness, as a biological fact unaffected by culture and thus unchanging and unproblematic, while viewing gender as a cultural phenomenon, a means by which people are taught who they are (e.g., girl or boy), how to behave (e.g., ladylike or tough), and what their roles will be (e.g., mother or father) (Sørensen, 2000). However, this mode of distinguishing between sex and gender has come under criticism, largely because new studies have revealed the cultural dimensions of sex itself (Schilt, 2010). That is, the physical characteristics of sex cannot be separated from the cultural milieu in which they are labeled and given meaning. In other words, the relationship between biology and behavior is reciprocal, both inseparable and intertwined (Sapolsky, 1997; Yoder, 2003).

Sex, as it turns out, is not a clear-cut matter of DNA, chromosomes, external genitalia, and the like, factors that produce two and only two sexes—female and male. First, there is considerable biological variation. Sex is not fixed in two categories. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993) suggests that sex is more like a continuum than a dichotomy. For example, all humans have estrogen, prolactin, and testosterone but in varying and changing levels (Abrams, 2002). Think about this: In American society, people tend to associate breasts and related phenomena, such as breast cancer and lactation, with women. However, men have breasts. Indeed, some men have bigger breasts than some women, some men lactate, and some men get

breast cancer. Also, in our society, people associate facial hair with men. What's the real story? All women have facial hair, and some have more of it than do some men. Indeed, recent hormonal and genetic studies (e.g., Abrams, 2002; Beale, 2001) are revealing that, biologically, women and men, female and male bodies are far more similar than different. In a short article, Vanessa Heggie (2015), an historian of science, notes that as early as the 1930s, scientists (e.g., geneticists) were aware of the non-binary nature of sex and gender. She emphasizes that "there has never been scientific (or philosophical, or sociological) consensus that there are simply two human sexes, that they are easily (and objectively) distinguished, and that there is no overlap between the groups. Nor have they agreed that all of us are 'really' one sex or the other. . . . You can examine someone's genitals, their blood, their genes, their taste in movies, the length of their hair, and make a judgement, but none of these constitute a universal or objective test for sex, let alone gender."

Second, not only do femaleness and maleness share much in common, but variations in and complexities of sex development produce *intersex* people whose bodies do not fit either of the two traditionally understood sex categories (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Fujimora, 2006). Until recently in the United States, intersex was kept a secret and treated as a medical emergency (Grabham, 2007). Now that activists and researchers are challenging the marginalization and medicalization of intersex people, we understand that intersex is not a rarity. Scientists estimate that up to 2% of live births are intersex. Among intersex births are babies born with both male and female characteristics and babies born with "larger-than-average" clitorises or "smaller-than-average" penises (Lucal, 2008). Joan H. Fujimora (2006) examined recent research on sex genes and concluded that "there is no single pathway through which sex is genetically determined" and we might consider sex variations, such as intersex, as resulting from "multiple developmental pathways that involve genetic, protein, hormonal, environmental, and other agents, actions, and interactions" (p. 71). Judith Lorber and Lisa Jean Moore (2007) argue that intersex people are akin to multiracial people. They point out that just as scientists have demonstrated through DNA testing that almost all of us are genetically interracial, similarly, "if many people were genetically sex-typed, we'd also find a variety of chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical patterns unrecognized" in our rigid, two-sex system (p. 138). In their chapter reading, Georgiann Davis and Sharon Preves examine the harmful consequences of the medicalization of intersex in the United States. They also discuss

in detail the emergence of the intersex rights movement both as a response to medically unnecessary "normalization" surgeries and as a challenge to the two-and-only-two sex/gender/sexuality system. Biology is a complicated business, and that should come as no surprise. The more we learn about biology, the more elusive and complex sex becomes. What seemed so obvious—two opposite sexes—turns out to be a gross oversimplification.

Then, what is gender? As discussed in the introduction to this book, gender is a human invention, a means by which people are sorted (in our society, into two gender categories), a basic aspect of how our society organizes itself and allocates resources (e.g., certain tasks assigned to people called women and other tasks to those termed men), and a fundamental ingredient in how individuals understand themselves and others ("I feel feminine"; "He's manly"; "You're androgynous").

One of the fascinating aspects of gender is the extent to which it is negotiable and dynamic. In effect, masculinity and femininity exist because people believe that women and men are distinct groups and, most important, because people "do gender," day in and day out, and enforce gender conformity. It is now common for gender scholars to refer to gender as a performance or a masquerade, emphasizing that it is through the ways we present ourselves in our daily encounters with others that gender is created and recreated. The chapter reading by Betsy Lucal illustrates vividly how gender is a matter of attribution and enactment.

We even do gender by ourselves, and sometimes quite self-consciously. Have you ever tried to make yourself look and act more masculine or feminine? What is involved in "putting on" femininity or masculinity? Consider *transvestism*, or cross-gender dressing. "Cross-dressers know that successfully being a man or a woman simply means convincing others that you are what you appear to be" (Kimmel, 2000, p. 104). Think about the emerging communities of *transgender* people who are "challenging, questioning, or changing gender from that assigned at birth to a chosen gender" (Lorber & Moore, 2007, p. 139). Although most people have deeply learned gender and view the gender category they inhabit as natural or normal, intersex and transgender activists attack the boundaries of "normal" by refusing to choose a traditional sex, gender, or sexual identity (Lorber & Moore, 2007). In so doing, cultural definitions of sex and gender are destabilized and expanded. Carla A. Pfeffer's chapter reading illustrates this process by exploring transgender identities and relationships, demonstrating how the experiences of "queer" social

actors have the potential to shake the foundations of normative binaries of sex, gender, and sexuality.

You may be wondering why we have not used the term *role*, as in *gender role*, to describe “doing gender.” The problem with the concept of roles is that many social roles, such as those of teacher, student, doctor, or nurse, are situation specific. However, gender, like race, is a status and identity that cuts across situations and institutional arenas. In other words, gender does not “appear and disappear from one situation to another” (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 32). In part, this is a consequence of the pressures that other people exert on us to “do gender” no matter the social location in which we find ourselves. Even if an individual would like to “give up gender,” others will work hard to define and interact with that individual in gendered terms. If you were an accountant, you could “leave your professional role behind you” when you left the office and went shopping or vacationing. Gender is a different story. Could you leave gender at the office? What would that look like, and what would it take to make it happen?

So far, we have explored gender as a product of our interactions with others. It is something we do, not something we inherit. Gender is also built into the larger world we inhabit in the United States, including its institutions, images and symbols, organizations, and material objects. For example, jobs, wages, and hierarchies of dominance and subordination in workplaces are gendered. Even after decades of substantial increase in women’s workforce participation, occupations continue to be allocated by gender (e.g., secretaries are overwhelmingly women; men dominate construction work) and a wage gap between men and women persists (Bose & Whaley, 2001; Steinberg, 2001; see also the introduction to this book and the introduction to Chapter 7). In addition, men are still more likely to be bosses and women to be bossed. The symbols and images that surround us and by which we communicate are another part of our society’s gender story. Our language speaks of difference and opposition in phrases such as “the opposite sex” and in the absence of any words except awkward medical terms (e.g., hermaphrodite) or epithets (e.g., fag) to refer to sex/sexual/gender variants. In addition, the swirl of standardized gendered images in the media is almost overwhelming. Blatant gender stereotypes still dominate TV, film, magazines, and billboards (Lont, 2001). Gender is also articulated, reinforced, and transformed through material objects and locales (Sørensen, 2000). Shoes are gendered, body adornments are gendered, public restrooms are gendered, ships are gendered, wrapping paper is gendered, and deodorants are

gendered. The list is endless. The point is that these locales and objects are transformed into a medium for gender to operate within (Sørensen, 2000). They make gender seem “real,” and they give it material consequences (p. 82).

Just as culture spawns the binary and oppositional sex and gender template (Grabham, 2007), sexuality, too, is socially constructed (see discussion in Chapter 6). It is not “a natural occurrence derived from biological sex” (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 443). But in the United States, the imperative to do heterosexuality dominates and is bound to privilege and power. Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook state that our gender system “must be conceived of as heterosexist, as power is allocated via positioning in the gender and sexual hierarchies” (p. 443). Masculinity and heterosexuality are privileged, while femininity and homosexuality are denigrated. Other sexualities (e.g., bisexuality and pansexuality) are relegated to the margins.

In short, social scientific research underscores the complexity of the prism of gender and demonstrates how gender/sex/sexuality are constructed at multiple, interacting levels of society. The first reading in this chapter, by Barbara J. Risman, is a detailed examination of the ways our gender structure is embedded in the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of our society, emphasizing that gender cannot be reduced to one level or dimension: individual, interactional, or institutional. We are literally and figuratively immersed in a gendered world—a world in which difference, opposition, and inequality are the culturally defined themes. And yet, that world is kaleidoscopic in nature. The lesson of the kaleidoscope is that “nothing in life is immune to change” (Baker, 1999, p. 29). Reality is in flux; you never know what’s coming next. The metaphor of the kaleidoscope reminds us to keep seeking the shifting meanings as well as the recurring patterns of gender (Baker, 1999).

We live in an interesting time of kaleidoscopic change. Old patterns of sex/gender/sexuality difference and inequality keep reappearing, often in new guises, while new patterns of convergence, equality, and self-realization have emerged. Social science research is vital in helping us stay focused on understanding the prism of gender as changeable and helping us respond to its context—as a social dialogue about societal membership and conventions and “as the outcome of how individuals are made to understand their differences and similarities” (Sørensen, 2000, pp. 203–204). With that focus in mind, we can more clearly and critically explore our gendered society.

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Introduction to Reading 1

Barbara Risman is a sociologist who has made significant contributions to research and writing on gender in heterosexual American families. In this article, she argues that we need to conceptualize gender as a social structure so we can better analyze the ways gender is embedded in the individual, interactional, and institutional dimensions of social life. You will want to pay special attention to Table 1.1, in which Risman summarizes social processes that create gender in each dimension.

1. Why does Risman include the individual dimension of social life in her theory of gender as a social structure?
2. What are the benefits of a multidimensional structural model of gender?
3. Define the concept “trading power for patronage,” and discuss at least two examples from your experience or observations of heterosexual relationships.

GENDER AS A SOCIAL STRUCTURE

THEORY WRESTLING WITH ACTIVISM

Barbara J. Risman

In this article, I briefly summarize my . . . argument that gender should be conceptualized as a social structure (Risman 1998) and extend it with an attempt to classify the mechanisms that help produce gendered outcomes within each dimension of the social structure.

GENDER AS SOCIAL STRUCTURE

With this theory of *gender as a social structure*, I offer a conceptual framework, a scheme to organize the confusing, almost limitless, ways in which gender has come to be defined in contemporary social science. Four distinct social scientific theoretical traditions have developed to explain gender. The first tradition

focuses on how individual sex differences originate, whether biological (Udry 2000) or social in origin (Bem 1993). The second tradition . . . emerged as a reaction to the first and focuses on how the social structure (as opposed to biology or individual learning) creates gendered behavior. The third tradition, also a reaction to the individualist thinking of the first, emphasizes social interaction and accountability to others' expectations, with a focus on how “doing gender” creates and reproduces inequality (West and Zimmerman 1987). The sex-differences literature, the doing gender interactional analyses, and the structural perspectives have been portrayed as incompatible in my own early writings as well as in that of others (Epstein 1988; Ferree 1990; Kanter 1977; Risman 1987; Risman and Schwartz 1989). England and

Risman, B. J. (2004). Gender as a social structure. *Gender & Society*, 18(4). Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications Inc., on behalf of Sociologists for Women in Society.

Browne (1992) argued persuasively that this incompatibility is an illusion: All structural theories must make assumptions about individuals, and individualist theories must make presumptions about external social control. While we do gender in every social interaction, it seems naive to ignore the gendered selves and cognitive schemas that children develop as they become cultural natives in a patriarchal world (Bem 1993). The more recent integrative approaches (Connell 2002; Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 1999; Lorber 1994; Risman 1998) treat gender as a socially constructed stratification system. This article fits squarely in the current integrative tradition.

Lorber (1994) argued that gender is an institution that is embedded in all the social processes of everyday life and social organizations. She further argued that gender difference is primarily a means to justify sexual stratification. Gender is so endemic because unless we see difference, we cannot justify inequality. I share this presumption that the creation of difference is the very foundation on which inequality rests.

I build on this notion of gender as an institution but find the institutional language distracting. The word “institution” is too commonly used to refer to particular aspects of society, for example, the family as an institution or corporations as institutions. My notion of gender structure meets the criteria offered by Martin (forthcoming). . . . While the language we use may differ, our goals are complementary, as we seek to situate gender as embedded not only in individuals but throughout social life (Patricia Martin, personal communication).

I prefer to define gender as a social structure because this brings gender to the same analytic plane as politics and economics, where the focus has long been on political and economic structures. While the language of structure suits my purposes, it is not ideal because despite ubiquitous usage in sociological discourse, no definition of the term “structure” is widely shared. Smelser (1988) suggested that all structuralists share the presumption that social structures exist outside individual desires or motives and that social structures at least partially explain human action. Beyond that, consensus dissipates. Blau (1977) focused solely on the constraint collective life imposes on the individual. Structure must be conceptualized, in his view, as a force opposing individual motivation. Structural concepts must be observable, external to the individual, and independent of individual motivation. This definition of “structure” imposes a clear dualism between structure and action, with structure as constraint and action as choice.

Constraint is, of course, an important function of structure, but to focus only on structure as constraint

minimizes its importance. Not only are women and men coerced into differential social roles; they often choose their gendered paths. A social structural analysis must help us understand how and why actors choose one alternative over another. A structural theory of action (e.g., Burt 1982) suggests that actors compare themselves and their options to those in structurally similar positions. From this viewpoint, actors are purposive, rationally seeking to maximize their self-perceived well-being under social-structural constraints. As Burt (1982) suggested, one can assume that actors choose the best alternatives without presuming they have either enough information to do it well or the options available to make choices that effectively serve their own interests. For example, married women may choose to do considerably more than their equitable share of child care rather than have their children do without whatever “good enough” parenting means to them if they see no likely alternative that the children’s father will pick up the slack.

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

While structural perspectives have been applied to gender in the past (Epstein 1988; Kanter 1977), there has been a fundamental flaw in these applications. Generic structural theories applied to gender presume that if women and men were to experience identical structural conditions and role expectations, empirically observable gender differences would disappear. But this ignores not only internalized gender at the individual level . . . but the cultural interactional

expectations that remain attached to women and men because of their gender category. A structural perspective on gender is accurate only if we realize that gender itself is a structure deeply embedded in society.

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

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

Connell (1987) applied Giddens's (1984) concern with social structure as both constraint and created by action in his treatise on gender and power (see particularly chapter 5). In his analysis, structure constrains action, yet "since human action involves free invention . . . and is reflexive, practice can be turned against what constrains it; so structure can deliberately be the object of practice" (Connell 1987, 95). Action may turn against structure but can never escape it.

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

Advantages to Gender Structure Theory

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

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

A third benefit to this multidimensional structural model is that it allows us to seriously investigate the

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

Perhaps the most important feature of this conceptual schema is its dynamism. No one dimension determines the other. Change is fluid and reverberates throughout the structure dynamically. Changes in individual identities and moral accountability may change interactional expectations, but the opposite is possible as well. Change cultural expectations, and individual identities are shaped

differently. Institutional changes must result from individuals or group action, yet such change is difficult, as institutions exist across time and space. Once institutional changes occur, they reverberate at the level of cultural expectations and perhaps even on identities. And the cycle of change continues. No mechanistic predictions are possible because human beings sometimes reject the structure itself and, by doing so, change it.

Social Processes Located by Dimension in the Gender Structure

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

The forces that create gender traditionalism for men and women may vary across space as well as time. Conceptualizing gender as a social structure contributes to a more postmodern, contextually specific social science. We can use this schema to begin to organize thinking about the causal processes that are most likely to be effective on each dimension. When we are concerned with the means by which individuals come to have a preference to do gender, we should focus on how identities are constructed through early childhood development, explicit socialization, modeling, and adult

Table 1.1 Dimensions of Gender Structure, by Illustrative Social Processes^a

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

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

experiences, paying close attention to the internalization of social mores. To the extent that women and men choose to do gender-typical behavior cross-situationally and over time, we must focus on such individual explanations. Indeed, much attention has already been given to gender socialization and the individualist presumptions for gender. The earliest and perhaps most commonly referred to explanations in popular culture depend on sex-role training, teaching boys and girls their culturally appropriate roles. But when trying to understand gender on the interactional/cultural dimension, the means by which status differences shape expectations and the ways in which in-group and out-group membership influences behavior need to be at the center of attention. Too little attention has been paid to how inequality is shaped by such cultural expectations during interaction. I return to this in the section below. On the institutional dimension, we look to law, organizational practices, and formal regulations that distinguish by sex category. Much progress has been made in the post-civil rights era with rewriting formal laws and organizational practices to ensure gender neutrality. Unfortunately, we have often found that despite changes in gender socialization and gender neutrality on the institutional dimension, gender stratification remains.

What I have attempted to do here is to offer a conceptual organizing scheme for the study of gender that can help us to understand gender in all its complexity and try to isolate the social processes that create gender in each dimension. Table 1.1 provides a schematic outline of this argument.²

Cultural Expectations During Interaction and the Stalled Revolution

In *Gender Vertigo* (Risman 1998), I suggested that at this moment in history, gender inequality between

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

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

is one of the causal mechanisms that help to explain the reproduction of gender and race inequality in everyday life. It may also be an important explanation for the reproduction of class and heterosexist inequality in everyday life as well, but that is an empirical question.

Schwalbe and his colleagues (2000, 419) suggested that there are other “generic interactive processes through which inequalities are created and reproduced in everyday life.” Some of these processes include othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotion management. Schwalbe and his colleagues suggested that subordinates’ adaptation plays an essential role in their own disadvantage. Subordinate adaptation helps to explain women’s strategy to adapt to the gender structure. Perhaps the most common adaptation of women to subordination is “trading power for patronage” (Schwalbe et al. 2000, 426). Women, as wives and daughters, often derive significant compensatory benefits from relationships with the men in their families. Stomblor and Martin (1994) similarly showed how little sisters in a fraternity trade affiliation for secondary status. In yet another setting, elite country clubs, Sherwood (2004) showed how women accept subordinate status as “B” members of clubs, in exchange for men’s approval, and how when a few wives challenge men’s privilege, they are threatened with social ostracism, as are their husbands. Women often gain the economic benefits of patronage for themselves and their children in exchange for their subordinate status.

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

These are only some of the processes that might be identified for understanding how we create gender inequality based on embodied cultural expectations. None are determinative causal predictors, but instead,

these are possible leads to reasonable and testable hypotheses about the production of gender. . . .

NOTES

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

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

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Introduction to Reading 2

By analyzing the challenges she faces in the course of her daily experience of negotiating the boundaries of our gendered society, sociologist Betsy Lucal describes the rigidity of the American binary gender system and the consequences for people who do not fit. Since her physical appearance does not clearly define her as a woman, she must navigate a world in which some people interact with her as though she is a man. Through analysis of her own story, Lucal demonstrates how gender is something we do, rather than something we are.

1. Why does Lucal argue that we cannot escape "doing gender"?
2. How does Lucal negotiate "not fitting" into the American two-and-only-two gender structure?
3. Have you ever experienced a mismatch between your gender identity and the gender that others perceive you to be? If so, how did you feel and respond?

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE GENDERED ME

Betsy Lucal

I understood the concept of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) long before I became a sociologist. I have been living with the consequences of inappropriate "gender display" (Goffman 1976; West and Zimmerman 1987) for as long as I can

remember. My daily experiences are a testament to the rigidity of gender in our society, to the real implications of "two and only two" when it comes to sex and gender categories (Garfinkel 1967; Kessler and McKenna 1978). Each day, I experience the

Lucal, B. (1999). What it means to be gendered me. *Gender & Society*, 13(6). Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications Inc., on behalf of Sociologists for Women in Society.

consequences that our gender system has for my identity and interactions. I am a woman who has been called “Sir” so many times that I no longer even hesitate to assume that it is being directed at me. I am a woman whose use of public rest rooms regularly causes reactions ranging from confused stares to confrontations over what a man is doing in the women’s room. I regularly enact a variety of practices either to minimize the need for others to know my gender or to deal with their misattributions.

I am the embodiment of Lorber’s (1994) ostensibly paradoxical assertion that the “gender bending” I engage in actually might serve to preserve and perpetuate gender categories. As a feminist who sees gender rebellion as a significant part of her contribution to the dismantling of sexism, I find this possibility disheartening.

In this article, I examine how my experiences both support and contradict Lorber’s (1994) argument using my own experiences to illustrate and reflect on the social construction of gender. My analysis offers a discussion of the consequences of gender for people who do not follow the rules as well as an examination of the possible implications of the existence of people like me for the gender system itself. Ultimately, I show how life on the boundaries of gender affects me and how my life, and the lives of others who make similar decisions about their participation in the gender system, has the potential to subvert gender.

Because this article analyzes my experiences as a woman who often is mistaken for a man, my focus is on the social construction of gender for women. My assumption is that, given the gendered nature of the gendering process itself, men’s experiences of this phenomenon might well be different from women’s.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

It is now widely accepted that gender is a social construction, that sex and gender are distinct, and that gender is something all of us “do.” This conceptualization of gender can be traced to Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodological study of “Agnes.”¹ In this analysis, Garfinkel examined the issues facing a male who wished to pass as, and eventually become, a woman. Unlike individuals who perform gender in culturally expected ways, Agnes could not take her gender for granted and always was in danger of failing to pass as a woman (Zimmerman 1992).

This approach was extended by Kessler and McKenna (1978) and codified in the classic “Doing Gender” by West and Zimmerman (1987). The social

constructionist approach has been developed most notably by Lorber (1994, 1996). Similar theoretical strains have developed outside of sociology, such as work by Butler (1990) and Weston (1996). . . .

Given our cultural rules for identifying gender (i.e., that there are only two and that masculinity is assumed in the absence of evidence to the contrary), a person who does not do gender appropriately is placed not into a third category but rather into the one with which her or his gender display seems most closely to fit; that is, if a man appears to be a woman, then he will be categorized as “woman,” not as something else. Even if a person does not want to do gender or would like to do a gender other than the two recognized by our society, other people will, in effect, do gender for that person by placing her or him in one and only one of the two available categories. We cannot escape doing gender or, more specifically, doing one of two genders. (There are exceptions in limited contexts such as people doing “drag” [Butler 1990; Lorber 1994].)

People who follow the norms of gender can take their genders for granted. Kessler and McKenna asserted, “Few people besides transsexuals think of their gender as anything other than ‘naturally’ obvious”; they believe that the risks of not being taken for the gender intended “are minimal for nontranssexuals” (1978, 126). However, such an assertion overlooks the experiences of people such as those women Devor (1989) calls “gender blenders” and those people Lorber (1994) refers to as “gender benders.” As West and Zimmerman (1987) pointed out, we all are held accountable for, and might be called on to account for, our genders.

People who, for whatever reasons, do not adhere to the rules, risk gender misattribution and any interactional consequences that might result from this misidentification. What are the consequences of misattribution for social interaction? When must misattribution be minimized? What will one do to minimize such mistakes? In this article, I explore these and related questions using my biography.

For me, the social processes and structures of gender mean that, in the context of our culture, my appearance will be read as masculine. Given the common conflation of sex and gender, I will be assumed to be a male. Because of the two-and-only-two genders rule, I will be classified, perhaps more often than not, as a man—not as an atypical woman, not as a genderless person. I must be one gender or the other; I cannot be neither, nor can I be both. This norm has a variety of mundane and serious consequences for my everyday existence. Like Myhre (1995), I have found that the

choice not to participate in femininity is not one made frivolously.

My experiences as a woman who does not do femininity illustrate a paradox of our two-and-only-two gender system. Lorber argued that “bending gender rules and passing between genders does not erode but rather preserves gender boundaries” (1994, 21). Although people who engage in these behaviors and appearances do “demonstrate the social constructedness of sex, sexuality, and gender” (Lorber 1994, 96), they do not actually disrupt gender. Devor made a similar point: “When gender blending females refused to mark themselves by publicly displaying sufficient femininity to be recognized as women, they were in no way challenging patriarchal gender assumptions” (1989, 142). As the following discussion shows, I have found that my own experiences both support and challenge this argument. Before detailing these experiences, I explain my use of my self as data.

MY SELF AS DATA

This analysis is based on my experiences as a person whose appearance and gender/sex are not, in the eyes of many people, congruent. How did my experiences become my data? I began my research “unwittingly” (Krieger 1991). This article is a product of “opportunistic research” in that I am using my “unique biography, life experiences, and/or situational familiarity to understand and explain social life” (Riemer 1988, 121; see also Riemer 1977). It is an analysis of “unplanned personal experience,” that is, experiences that were not part of a research project but instead are part of my daily encounters (Reinharz 1992).

This work also is, at least to some extent, an example of Richardson’s (1994) notion of writing as a method of inquiry. As a sociologist who specializes in gender, the more I learned, the more I realized that my life could serve as a case study. As I examined my experiences, I found out things—about my experiences and about theory—that I did not know when I started (Richardson 1994).

It also is useful, I think, to consider my analysis an application of Mills’s (1959) “sociological imagination.” Mills (1959) and Berger (1963) wrote about the importance of seeing the general in the particular. This means that general social patterns can be discerned in the behaviors of particular individuals. In this article, I am examining portions of my biography, situated in U.S. society during the 1990s, to understand the

“personal troubles” my gender produces in the context of a two-and-only-two gender system. I am not attempting to generalize my experiences; rather, I am trying to use them to examine and reflect on the processes and structure of gender in our society.

Because my analysis is based on my memories and perceptions of events, it is limited by my ability to recall events and by my interpretation of those events. However, I am not claiming that my experiences provide the truth about gender and how it works. I am claiming that the biography of a person who lives on the margins of our gender system can provide theoretical insights into the processes and social structure of gender. Therefore, after describing my experiences, I examine how they illustrate and extend, as well as contradict, other work on the social construction of gender.

GENDERED ME

Each day, I negotiate the boundaries of gender. Each day, I face the possibility that someone will attribute the “wrong” gender to me based on my physical appearance. I am six feet tall and large-boned. I have had short hair for most of my life. For the past several years, I have worn a crew cut or flat top. I do not shave or otherwise remove hair from my body (e.g., no eyebrow plucking). I do not wear dresses, skirts, high heels, or makeup. My only jewelry is a class ring, a “men’s” watch (my wrists are too large for a “women’s” watch), two small earrings (gold hoops, both in my left ear), and (occasionally) a necklace. I wear jeans or shorts, T-shirts, sweaters, polo/golf shirts, button-down collar shirts, and tennis shoes or boots. The jeans are “women’s” (I do have hips) but do not look particularly “feminine.” The rest of the outer garments are from men’s departments. I prefer baggy clothes, so the fact that I have “womanly” breasts often is not obvious (I do not wear a bra).

Sometimes, I wear a baseball cap or some other type of hat. I also am white and relatively young (30 years old).² My gender display—what others interpret as my presented identity—regularly leads to the misattribution of my gender. An incongruity exists between my gender self-identity and the gender that others perceive. In my encounters with people I do not know, I sometimes conclude, based on our interactions, that they think I am a man. This does not mean that other people do not think I am a man, just that I have no way of knowing what they think without interacting with them.

Living With It

I have no illusions or delusions about my appearance. I know that my appearance is likely to be read as “masculine” (and male) and that how I see myself is socially irrelevant. Given our two-and-only-two gender structure, I must live with the consequences of my appearance. These consequences fall into two categories: issues of identity and issues of interaction.

My most common experience is being called “Sir” or being referred to by some other masculine linguistic marker (e.g., “he,” “man”). This has happened for years, for as long as I can remember, when having encounters with people I do not know.³ Once, in fact, the same worker at a fast-food restaurant called me “Ma’am” when she took my order and “Sir” when she gave it to me.

Using my credit cards sometimes is a challenge. Some clerks subtly indicate their disbelief, looking from the card to me and back at the card and checking my signature carefully. Others challenge my use of the card, asking whose it is or demanding identification. One cashier asked to see my driver’s license and then asked me whether I was the son of the cardholder. Another clerk told me that my signature on the receipt “had better match” the one on the card. Presumably, this was her way of letting me know that she was not convinced it was my credit card.

My identity as a woman also is called into question when I try to use women-only spaces. Encounters in public rest rooms are an adventure. I have been told countless times that “This is the ladies’ room.” Other women say nothing to me, but their stares and conversations with others let me know what they think. I will hear them say, for example, “There was a man in there.” I also get stares when I enter a locker room. However, it seems that women are less concerned about my presence, there, perhaps because, given that it is a space for changing clothes, showering, and so forth, they will be able to make sure that I am really a woman. Dressing rooms in department stores also are problematic spaces. I remember shopping with my sister once and being offered a chair outside the room when I began to accompany her into the dressing room. Women who believe that I am a man do not want me in women-only spaces. For example, one woman would not enter the rest room until I came out, and others have told me that I am in the wrong place. They also might not want to encounter me while they are alone. For example, seeing me walking at night when they are alone might be scary.⁴

I, on the other hand, am not afraid to walk alone, day or night. I do not worry that I will be subjected to

the public harassment that many women endure (Gardner 1995). I am not a clear target for a potential rapist. I rely on the fact that a potential attacker would not want to attack a big man by mistake. This is not to say that men never are attacked, just that they are not viewed, and often do not view themselves, as being vulnerable to attack.

Being perceived as a man has made me privy to male-male interactional styles of which most women are not aware. I found out, quite by accident, that many men greet, or acknowledge, people (mostly other men) who make eye contact with them with a single nod. For example, I found that when I walked down the halls of my brother’s all-male dormitory making eye contact, men nodded their greetings at me. Oddly enough, these same men did not greet my brother.

I had to tell him about making eye contact and nodding as a greeting ritual. Apparently, in this case I was doing masculinity better than he was! I also believe that I am treated differently, for example, in auto parts stores (staffed almost exclusively by men in most cases) because of the assumption that I am a man. Workers there assume that I know what I need and that my questions are legitimate requests for information.

I suspect that I am treated more fairly than a feminine-appearing woman would be. I have not been able to test this proposition. However, Devor’s participants did report “being treated more respectfully” (1989, 132) in such situations. There is, however, a negative side to being assumed to be a man by other men. Once, a friend and I were driving in her car when a man failed to stop at an intersection and nearly crashed into us. As we drove away, I mouthed “stop sign” to him. When we both stopped our cars at the next intersection, he got out of his car and came up to the passenger side of the car, where I was sitting. He yelled obscenities at us and pounded and spit on the car window. Luckily, the windows were closed. I do not think he would have done that if he thought I was a woman. This was the first time I realized that one of the implications of being seen as a man was that I might be called on to defend myself from physical aggression from other men who felt challenged by me. This was a sobering and somewhat frightening thought.

Recently, I was verbally accosted by an older man who did not like where I had parked my car. As I walked down the street to work, he shouted that I should park at the university rather than on a side street nearby. I responded that it was a public street and that I could park there if I chose. He continued to yell, but the only thing I caught was the last part of what he said: “Your tires are going to get cut!” Based on my

appearance that day—I was dressed casually and carrying a backpack, and I had my hat on backward—I believe he thought that I was a young male student rather than a female professor. I do not think he would have yelled at a person he thought to be a woman—and perhaps especially not a woman professor.

Given the presumption of heterosexuality that is part of our system of gender, my interactions with women who assume that I am a man also can be viewed from that perspective. For example, once my brother and I were shopping when we were “hit on” by two young women. The encounter ended before I realized what had happened. It was only when we walked away that I told him that I was pretty certain that they had thought both of us were men. A more common experience is realizing that when I am seen in public with one of my women friends, we are likely to be read as a heterosexual dyad. It is likely that if I were to walk through a shopping mall holding hands with a woman, no one would look twice, not because of their open-mindedness toward lesbian couples but rather because of their assumption that I was the male half of a straight couple. Recently, when walking through a mall with a friend and her infant, my observations of others’ responses to us led me to believe that many of them assumed that we were a family on an outing, that is, that I was her partner and the father of the child.

Dealing With It

Although I now accept that being mistaken for a man will be a part of my life so long as I choose not to participate in femininity, there have been times when I consciously have tried to appear more feminine. I did this for a while when I was an undergraduate and again recently when I was on the academic job market. The first time, I let my hair grow nearly down to my shoulders and had it permed. I also grew long fingernails and wore nail polish. Much to my chagrin, even then one of my professors, who did not know my name, insistently referred to me in his kinship examples as “the son.” Perhaps my first act on the way to my current stance was to point out to this man, politely and after class, that I was a woman.

More recently, I again let my hair grow out for several months, although I did not alter other aspects of my appearance. Once my hair was about two and a half inches long (from its original quarter inch), I realized, based on my encounters with strangers, that I had more or less passed back into the category of “woman.” Then, when I returned to wearing a flat top, people again responded to me as if I were a man.

Because of my appearance, much of my negotiation of interactions with strangers involves attempts to anticipate their reactions to me. I need to assess whether they will be likely to assume that I am a man and whether that actually matters in the context of our encounters. Many times, my gender really is irrelevant, and it is just annoying to be misidentified. Other times, particularly when my appearance is coupled with something that identifies me by name (e.g., a check or credit card) without a photo, I might need to do something to ensure that my identity is not questioned. As a result of my experiences, I have developed some techniques to deal with gender misattribution.

In general, in unfamiliar public places, I avoid using the rest room because I know that it is a place where there is a high likelihood of misattribution and where misattribution is socially important. If I must use a public rest room, I try to make myself look as nonthreatening as possible. I do not wear a hat, and I try to rearrange my clothing to make my breasts more obvious. Here, I am trying to use my secondary sex characteristics to make my gender more obvious rather than the usual use of gender to make sex obvious. While in the rest room, I never make eye contact, and I get in and out as quickly as possible. Going in with a woman friend also is helpful; her presence legitimizes my own. People are less likely to think I am entering a space where I do not belong when I am with someone who looks like she does belong.⁵

To those women who verbally challenge my presence in the rest room, I reply, “I know,” usually in an annoyed tone. When they stare or talk about me to the women they are with, I simply get out as quickly as possible. In general, I do not wait for someone I am with because there is too much chance of an unpleasant encounter.

I stopped trying on clothes before purchasing them a few years ago because my presence in the changing areas was met with stares and whispers. Exceptions are stores where the dressing rooms are completely private, where there are individual stalls rather than a room with stalls separated by curtains, or where business is slow and no one else is trying on clothes. If I am trying on a garment clearly intended for a woman, then I usually can do so without hassle. I guess the attendants assume that I must be a woman if I have, for example, a women’s bathing suit in my hand. But usually, I think it is easier for me to try the clothes on at home and return them, if necessary, rather than risk creating a scene. Similarly, when I am with another woman who is trying on clothes, I just wait outside.

My strategy with credit cards and checks is to anticipate wariness on a clerk's part. When I sense that there is some doubt or when they challenge me, I say, "It's my card." I generally respond courteously to requests for photo ID, realizing that these might be routine checks because of concerns about increasingly widespread fraud. But for the clerk who asked for ID and still did not think it was my card, I had a stronger reaction. When she said that she was sorry for embarrassing me, I told her that I was not embarrassed but that she should be. I also am particularly careful to make sure that my signature is consistent with the back of the card. Faced with such situations, I feel somewhat nervous about signing my name—which, of course, makes me worry that my signature will look different from how it should.

Another strategy I have been experimenting with is wearing nail polish in the dark bright colors currently fashionable. I try to do this when I travel by plane. Given more stringent travel regulations, one always must present a photo ID. But my experiences have shown that my driver's license is not necessarily convincing. Nail polish might be. I also flash my polished nails when I enter airport rest rooms, hoping that they will provide a clue that I am indeed in the right place.

There are other cases in which the issues are less those of identity than of all the norms of interaction that, in our society, are gendered. My most common response to misattribution actually is to appear to ignore it, that is, to go on with the interaction as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened. Unless I feel that there is a good reason to establish my correct gender, I assume the identity others impose on me for the sake of smooth interaction. For example, if someone is selling me a movie ticket, then there is no reason to make sure that the person has accurately discerned my gender. Similarly, if it is clear that the person using "Sir" is talking to me, then I simply respond as appropriate. I accept the designation because it is irrelevant to the situation. It takes enough effort to be alert for misattributions and to decide which of them matter; responding to each one would take more energy than it is worth.

Sometimes, if our interaction involves conversation, my first verbal response is enough to let the other person know that I am actually a woman and not a man. My voice apparently is "feminine" enough to shift people's attributions to the other category. I know when this has happened by the apologies that usually accompany the mistake. I usually respond to the apologies by saying something like "No problem" and/or "It happens all the time." Sometimes, a

misattributor will offer an account for the mistake, for example, saying that it was my hair or that they were not being very observant.

These experiences with gender and misattribution provide some theoretical insights into contemporary Western understandings of gender and into the social structure of gender in contemporary society. Although there are a number of ways in which my experiences confirm the work of others, there also are some ways in which my experiences suggest other interpretations and conclusions.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Gender is pervasive in our society. I cannot choose not to participate in it. Even if I try not to do gender, other people will do it for me. That is, given our two-and-only-two rule, they must attribute one of two genders to me. Still, although I cannot choose not to participate in gender, I can choose not to participate in femininity (as I have), at least with respect to physical appearance. That is where the problems begin. Without the decorations of femininity, I do not look like a woman. That is, I do not look like what many people's commonsense understanding of gender tells them a woman looks like. How I see myself, even how I might wish others would see me, is socially irrelevant. It is the gender that I appear to be (my "perceived gender") that is most relevant to my social identity and interactions with others. The major consequence of this fact is that I must be continually aware of which gender I "give off" as well as which gender I "give" (Goffman 1959).

Because my gender self-identity is "not displayed obviously, immediately, and consistently" (Devor 1989, 58), I am somewhat of a failure in social terms with respect to gender. Causing people to be uncertain or wrong about one's gender is a violation of taken-for-granted rules that leads to embarrassment and discomfort; it means that something has gone wrong with the interaction (Garfinkel 1967; Kessler and McKenna 1978). This means that my non-response to misattribution is the more socially appropriate response; I am allowing others to maintain face (Goffman 1959, 1967). By not calling attention to their mistakes, I uphold their images of themselves as competent social actors. I also maintain my own image as competent by letting them assume that I am the gender I appear to them to be.

But I still have discreditable status; I carry a stigma (Goffman 1963). Because I have failed to participate

appropriately in the creation of meaning with respect to gender (Devor 1989), I can be called on to account for my appearance. If discredited, I show myself to be an incompetent social actor. I am the one not following the rules, and I will pay the price for not providing people with the appropriate cues for placing me in the gender category to which I really belong.

I do think that it is, in many cases, safer to be read as a man than as some sort of deviant woman. “Man” is an acceptable category; it fits properly into people’s gender worldview. Passing as a man often is “the path of least resistance” (Devor 1989; Johnson 1997). For example, in situations where gender does not matter, letting people take me as a man is easier than correcting them.

Conversely, as Butler noted, “We regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (1990, 140). Feinberg maintained, “Masculine girls and women face terrible condemnation and brutality—including sexual violence—for crossing the boundary of what is ‘acceptable’ female expression” (1996, 114). People are more likely to harass me when they perceive me to be a woman who looks like a man. For example, when a group of teenagers realized that I was not a man because one of their mothers identified me correctly, they began to make derogatory comments when I passed them. One asked, for example, “Does she have a penis?”

Because of the assumption that a “masculine” woman is a lesbian, there is the risk of homophobic reactions (Gardner 1995; Lucal 1997). Perhaps surprisingly, I find that I am much more likely to be taken for a man than for a lesbian, at least based on my interactions with people and their reactions to me. This might be because people are less likely to reveal that they have taken me for a lesbian because it is less relevant to an encounter or because they believe this would be unacceptable. But I think it is more likely a product of the strength of our two-and-only-two system. I give enough masculine cues that I am seen not as a deviant woman but rather as a man, at least in most cases. The problem seems not to be that people are uncertain about my gender, which might lead them to conclude that I was a lesbian once they realized I was a woman. Rather, I seem to fit easily into a gender category—just not the one with which I identify. In fact, because men represent the dominant gender in our society, being mistaken for a man can protect me from other types of gendered harassment. Because men can move around in public spaces safely (at least relative to women), a “masculine” woman also can enjoy this freedom (Devor 1989).

On the other hand, my use of particular spaces—those designated as for women only—may be challenged. Feinberg provided an intriguing analysis of the public rest room experience. She characterized women’s reactions to a masculine person in a public rest room as “an example of genderphobia” (1996, 117), viewing such women as policing gender boundaries rather than believing that there really is a man in the women’s rest room. She argued that women who truly believed that there was a man in their midst would react differently. Although this is an interesting perspective on her experiences, my experiences do not lead to the same conclusion.⁶

Enough people have said to me that “This is the ladies’ room” or have said to their companions that “There was a man in there” that I take their reactions at face value. Still, if the two-and-only-two gender system is to be maintained, participants must be involved in policing the categories and their attendant identities and spaces. Even if policing boundaries is not explicitly intended, boundary maintenance is the effect of such responses to people’s gender displays.

Boundaries and margins are an important component of both my experiences of gender and our theoretical understanding of gendering processes. I am in effect both woman and not woman. As a woman who often is a social man but who also is a woman living in a patriarchal society, I am in a unique position to see and act.

I sometimes receive privileges usually limited to men, and I sometimes am oppressed by my status as a deviant woman. I am, in a sense, an outsider within (Collins 1991). Positioned on the boundaries of gender categories, I have developed a consciousness that I hope will prove transformative (Anzaldúa 1987). In fact, one of the reasons why I decided to continue my non-participation in femininity was that my sociological training suggested that this could be one of my contributions to the eventual dismantling of patriarchal gender constructs. It would be my way of making the personal political. I accepted being taken for a man as the price I would pay to help subvert patriarchy. I believed that all of the inconveniences I was enduring meant that I actually was doing something to bring down the gender structures that entangled all of us.

Then, I read Lorber’s (1994) *Paradoxes of Gender* and found out, much to my dismay, that I might not actually be challenging gender after all. Because of the way in which doing gender works in our two-and-only-two system, gender displays are simply read as evidence of one of the two categories. Therefore, gender bending, blending, and passing between the

categories do not question the categories themselves. If one's social gender and personal (true) gender do not correspond, then this is irrelevant unless someone notices the lack of congruence.

This reality brings me to a paradox of my experiences. First, not only do others assume that I am one gender or the other, but I also insist that I *really am* a member of one of the two gender categories. That is, I am female; I self-identify as a woman. I do not claim to be some other gender or to have no gender at all. I simply place myself in the wrong category according to stereotypes and cultural standards; the gender I present, or that some people perceive me to be presenting, is inconsistent with the gender with which I identify myself as well as with the gender I could be "proven" to be. Socially, I display the wrong gender; personally, I identify as the proper gender.

Second, although I ultimately would like to see the destruction of our current gender structure, I am not to the point of personally abandoning gender. Right now, I do not want people to see me as genderless as much as I want them to see me as a woman. That is, I would like to expand the category of "woman" to include people like me. I, too, am deeply embedded in our gender system, even though I do not play by many of its rules. For me, as for most people in our society, gender is a substantial part of my personal identity (Howard and Hollander 1997). Socially, the problem is that I do not present a gender display that is consistently read as feminine. In fact, I consciously do not participate in the trappings of femininity. However, I do identify myself as a woman, not as a man or as someone outside of the two-and-only-two categories.

Yet, I do believe, as Lorber (1994) does, that the purpose of gender, as it currently is constructed, is to oppress women. Lorber analyzed gender as a "process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities" that ends up putting women in a devalued and oppressed position (1994, 32). As Martin put it, "Bodies that clearly delineate gender status facilitate the maintenance of the gender hierarchy" (1998, 495).

For society, gender means difference (Lorber 1994). The erosion of the boundaries would problematize that structure. Therefore, for gender to operate as it currently does, the category "woman" is expanded to include people like me. The maintenance of the gender structure is dependent on the creation of a few categories that are mutually exclusive, the members of which are as different as possible (Lorber 1994). It is the clarity of the boundaries between the categories that allows gender to be used to assign rights and responsibilities as well as resources and rewards.

It is that part of gender—what it is used for—that is most problematic. Indeed, is it not *patriarchal*—or, even more specifically, *heteropatriarchal*—constructions of gender that are actually the problem? It is not the differences between men and women, or the categories themselves, so much as the meanings ascribed to the categories and, even more important, the hierarchical nature of gender under patriarchy that is the problem (Johnson 1997). Therefore, I am rebelling not against my femaleness or even my womanhood; instead, I am protesting contemporary constructions of femininity and, at least indirectly, masculinity under patriarchy. We do not, in fact, know what gender would look like if it were not constructed around heterosexuality in the context of patriarchy. Although it is possible that the end of patriarchy would mean the end of gender, it is at least conceivable that something like what we now call gender could exist in a postpatriarchal future. The two-and-only-two categorization might well disappear, there being no hierarchy for it to justify. But I do not think that we should make the assumption that gender and patriarchy are synonymous.

Theoretically, this analysis points to some similarities and differences between the work of Lorber (1994) and the works of Butler (1990), Goffman (1976, 1977), and West and Zimmerman (1987). Lorber (1994) conceptualized gender as social structure, whereas the others focused more on the interactive and processual nature of gender. Butler (1990) and Goffman (1976, 1977) view gender as a performance, and West and Zimmerman (1987) examined it as something all of us do. One result of this difference in approach is that in Lorber's (1994) work, gender comes across as something that we are caught in, something that, despite any attempts to the contrary, we cannot break out of. This conclusion is particularly apparent in Lorber's argument that gender rebellion, in the context of our two-and-only-two system, ends up supporting what it purports to subvert. Yet, my own experiences suggest an alternative possibility that is more in line with the view of gender offered by West and Zimmerman (1987): If gender is a product of interaction, and if it is produced in a particular context, then it can be changed if we change our performances. However, the effects of a performance linger, and gender ends up being institutionalized. It is institutionalized, in our society, in a way that perpetuates inequality, as Lorber's (1994) work shows. So, it seems that a combination of these two approaches is needed.

In fact, Lorber's (1994) work seems to suggest that effective gender rebellion requires a more blatant approach—bearded men in dresses, perhaps, or more active responses to misattribution. For example, if

I corrected every person who called me “Sir,” and if I insisted on my right to be addressed appropriately and granted access to women-only spaces, then perhaps I could start to break down gender norms. If I asserted my right to use public facilities without being harassed, and if I challenged each person who gave me “the look,” then perhaps I would be contributing to the demise of gender as we know it. It seems that the key would be to provide visible evidence of the nonmutual exclusivity of the categories. Would *this* break down the patriarchal components of gender? Perhaps it would, but it also would be exhausting.

Perhaps there is another possibility. In a recent book, *The Gender Knot*, Johnson (1997) argued that when it comes to gender and patriarchy, most of us follow the paths of least resistance; we “go along to get along,” allowing our actions to be shaped by the gender system. Collectively, our actions help patriarchy maintain and perpetuate a system of oppression and privilege. Thus, by withdrawing our support from this system by choosing paths of greater resistance, we can start to chip away at it. Many people participate in gender because they cannot imagine any alternatives. In my classroom, and in my interactions and encounters with strangers, my presence can make it difficult for people not to see that there *are* other paths. In other words, following from West and Zimmerman (1987), I can subvert gender by doing it differently.

For example, I think it is true that my existence does not have an effect on strangers who assume that I am a man and never learn otherwise. For them, I do uphold the two-and-only-two system. But there are other cases in which my existence can have an effect. For example, when people initially take me for a man but then find out that I actually am a woman, at least for that moment, the naturalness of gender may be called into question. In these cases, my presence can provoke a “category crisis” (Garber 1992, 16) because it challenges the sex/gender binary system.

The subversive potential of my gender might be strongest in my classrooms. When I teach about the sociology of gender, my students can see me as the embodiment of the social construction of gender. Not all of my students have transformative experiences as a result of taking a course with me; there is the chance that some of them see me as a “freak” or as an exception. Still, after listening to stories about my experiences with gender and reading literature on the subject, many students begin to see how and why gender is a social product. I can disentangle sex, gender, and sexuality in the contemporary United States

for them. Students can begin to see the connection between biographical experiences and the structure of society. As one of my students noted, I clearly live the material I am teaching. If that helps me to get my point across, then perhaps I am subverting the binary gender system after all. Although my gendered presence and my way of doing gender might make others—and sometimes even me—uncomfortable, no one ever said that dismantling patriarchy was going to be easy.

NOTES

1. Ethnomethodology has been described as “the study of commonsense practical reasoning” (Collins 1988, 274). It examines how people make sense of their everyday experiences. Ethnomethodology is particularly useful in studying gender because it helps to uncover the assumptions on which our understandings of sex and gender are based.

2. I obviously have left much out by not examining my gendered experiences in the context of race, age, class, sexuality, region, and so forth. Such a project clearly is more complex. As Weston pointed out, gender presentations are complicated by other statuses of their presenters: “What it takes to kick a person over into another gendered category can differ with race, class, religion, and time” (1996, 168). Furthermore, I am well aware that my whiteness allows me to assume that my experiences are simply a product of gender (see, e.g., hooks 1981; Lucal 1996; Spelman 1988; West and Fenstermaker 1995). For now, suffice it to say that it is my privileged position on some of these axes and my more disadvantaged position on others that combine to delineate my overall experience.

3. In fact, such experiences are not always limited to encounters with strangers. My grandmother, who does not see me often, twice has mistaken me for either my brother-in-law or some unknown man.

4. My experiences in rest rooms and other public spaces might be very different if I were, say, African American rather than white. Given the stereotypes of African American men, I think that white women would react very differently to encountering me (see, e.g., Staples [1986] 1993).

5. I also have noticed that there are certain types of rest rooms in which I will not be verbally challenged; the higher the social status of the place, the less likely I will be harassed. For example, when I go to the theater, I might get stared at, but my presence never has been challenged.

6. An anonymous reviewer offered one possible explanation for this. Women see women’s rest rooms as their space; they feel safe, and even empowered, there. Instead of fearing men in such space, they might instead pose a threat to any man who might intrude. Their invulnerability in this situation is, of course, not physically based but rather socially constructed. I thank the reviewer for this suggestion.

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Introduction to Reading 3

Sociologists Georgiann Davis and Sharon Preves are at the cutting-edge of intersex theory and activism. In this reading, they bring their deep understanding together to explore what intersex is and how intersex advocacy emerged and developed in the United States. Intersex is a natural physical variation occurring in approximately 1 of every 2,000 births worldwide. The majority of intersex traits are not harmful. However, in the United States, intersex has been medicalized and intersex people have commonly been subjected to dangerous “normalization” surgeries and treatments in an effort on the part of medical providers to fit intersex bodies into the two-and-only-two sexes (female or male) binary. The intersex rights movement began in the late 1980s to challenge the medical establishment and has rapidly grown into a global movement. Davis and Preves detail the struggles of intersex advocates to challenge the ethics of normalization surgeries and, on a broader scale, to unsettle the sex binary itself.

1. How does the reality of intersex demonstrate the flaws of binary thinking about sex?
2. What is the terminology debate, and why is the language of intersex important?
3. What is the relationship between the intersex rights movement and other movements for gender and sexual equality?

REFLECTING ON INTERSEX

25 YEARS OF ACTIVISM, MOBILIZATION, AND CHANGE

Georgiann Davis and Sharon Preves

INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF INTERSEX AS A MEDICAL PROBLEM

“A pregnancy test?” I, Georgiann Davis, was so confused. Before the medical scheduler would even agree to arrange the endocrinology consultation that my primary care provider had requested, she insisted that I needed a slew of lab work—eleven orders to be exact: progesterone, leutinizing hormone, prolactin, testosterone, free T4, vitamin D 1,25-dihydroxy, phosphorus, estradiol, glycohemoglobin, TSH ultrasensitive, and serum qualitative pregnancy. I asked the medical scheduler again, but this time with obvious frustration: “Why a pregnancy test? That makes no sense. I can’t get pregnant.” Apologetically the medical scheduler explained that the endocrinologist required the results of my pregnancy test before even allowing her to schedule a consultation. While a pregnancy test might seem like a harmless and routine test for a medical provider to require of a thirty-four-year-old woman seeking an endocrinology consultation, I’m not your average woman. You might be thinking that I am trans*, but I’m not. I’m an intersex queer woman and a sociologist who studies intersex. I’m also the 2014–2015 president of the AIS-DSD Support Group, one of the largest intersex support groups in the world.¹ I was born with complete androgen insensitivity syndrome (CAIS), an intersex trait that was diagnosed in the mid-1990s. I later learned the mid-1990s was also the same point in history when the intersex rights movement was in its infancy in the United States. I have XY chromosomes and a vagina but no uterus. I had testes, but they were removed when I was a teenager. My parents agreed to this medically unnecessary surgery because my medical providers suggested that doing so would minimize my

risk of cancer—a claim that is not empirically supported (Nakhal et al. 2013). Pregnancy is biologically impossible in my body, so the pregnancy test made no sense. I find my experiences with medical care, then and now, unnecessarily frustrating and humiliating, which leaves me asking, with a mentor, colleague, and friend, sociologist Sharon Preves, how much has intersex medical care, and the advocacy that seeks to critically examine and disrupt it, changed over the past twenty-five years, and how much has it stayed the same?²

Intersex is a natural physical variation occurring in approximately 1 of every 2,000 births worldwide. The term *intersex* represents the “I” in the acronym LGBTI and refers to the diversity in physical sex development that differs from typical female or male anatomy. The “LGB” in the acronym LGBTI refers to lesbian, gay, or bisexual sexual identities, and the “T” stands for transgender or transsexual (often abbreviated as “T*”), which relates specifically to one’s sense of gender identity and gender expression as feminine or masculine in a way that is not congruent with their biological female or male sex at birth. The current medical model of surgically and hormonally “correcting” intersex variations emerged primarily from the work of Johns Hopkins University psychologist John Money in the mid-1950s.

Intersex terminology emerged in the late nineteenth century and was used not only when referring to hermaphrodites, the more popular pre-twentieth-century term for intersex people, but to homosexuals as well (Epstein 1990). Today, the term *hermaphrodite* is considered derogatory by many, although not all, people with intersex traits. The term *intersex*, and its derivatives, including intersex traits, intersex conditions, and the like, is still widely used and accepted by intersex

people and their families. However, as we explain later, *intersex* was renamed a *disorder of sex development* throughout the medical community at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which has caused terminological tensions in the intersex community.

In contemporary Western societies, it is commonly understood that biological sex, which comprises chromosomes, hormones, gonads, external genitalia, and internal reproductive structures, is a simple two-category phenomenon that is naturally correlated with our gender identity. Men have penises, testes, and XY chromosomes while women have vaginas, ovaries, uteruses, and XX chromosomes. However, sex is anything but simple and one's biological sex isn't always correlated with their gender or sexual identity. For example, many people with CAIS, Georgiann included, are born with an outward female appearance, and most live their lives as women. They have vaginas, yet they also have undescended testes and XY chromosomes. Women with CAIS do not have a uterus. None of this, however, would be obvious without invasive exploratory surgeries or the power of medical technologies, such as imaging and chromosome testing, which reveal such complexities of biological sex. CAIS is only one example of an intersex trait. In fact, there are more than twenty different documented types of intersex traits. Hypospadias, for example, is an intersex trait in which the urethral opening of the penis is located along the base or shaft of the penis rather than at the tip. Some intersex traits result in externally ambiguous genitalia, but others, like CAIS or minor hypospadias, do not.

Hypospadias is quite common and has been increasing in frequency in recent decades, occurring in an estimated 1 of every 250 male births (Baskin 2012; Holmes 2011). Surgery to "correct" the position of the urethral opening to facilitate standing during urination is very common, as many medical providers view the ability to stand while urinating as central to masculine identity and social acceptance by one's peers. Note that many men with hypospadias do not identify as intersex and that historically men lived full lives with hypospadias prior to the invention of surgical "repair." Men with hypospadias often experience ongoing problems following hypospadias "repair" surgery, such as frequent urinary tract infections, narrowing of the urethral canal due to the buildup of scar tissue, and painful urination. Chronic complications resulting from surgeries to "correct" the position of the urethra are common—so common, in fact, that doctors coined the term *hypospadias cripple* to describe patients who experience ongoing and debilitating surgically induced complications (Craig et al. 2014).

Although the majority of intersex traits are not physiologically harmful, the birth of an intersex baby

is often viewed as a medical emergency (see Davis and Murphy 2013; Preves 2003), a rather predictable response given that childbirth is medicalized throughout the Western world, especially in the United States where, more often than not, babies are born in hospitals under the care of medical doctors and nurses whose task is to ensure the safe delivery of a healthy baby. The issue here is that intersex traits rarely pose health concerns. Yet, because intersex bodies are viewed as unhealthy because they deviate from social expectations of what male and female bodies, especially genitalia, ought to look like, medical providers are quick to recommend and perform urgent surgical and hormonal "correction" (Davis and Murphy 2013; Preves 2003). Because childbirth occurs in a medical setting, the response to any "deviance" in a newborn's body is medical. Intersex "deviance" is medically "normalized" by surgical and hormonal interventions to create cosmetically typical female or male bodies.

Prior to the twentieth century, medical providers did not have the tools, for example surgical expertise and chromosomal testing, that they have now to "fix" intersex bodies. As Geertje Mak (2012) notes in a study of nineteenth-century hermaphrodite case histories, rather than attempt to biologically capture or prove an individual's sex, medical providers understood sex as embedded within the social, moral, and legal fabric of the individual's community through the type of occupation one held (or eventually held), the clothes one wore (or chose to wear when the individual was able to independently make such choices), and the social relationships one maintained. Sex was regarded as a social location and not a physical bodily phenomenon.

Medical advances of the twentieth century offered providers the tools to subject intersex people to "normalization" surgeries (Reis 2009; also see Warren 2014 for a discussion of an eighteenth-century surgery). These procedures are designed to "normalize" intersex bodies by erasing evidence of any sex difference that challenges a sex/gender binary. For instance, medical providers often recommend that people with CAIS undergo a gonadectomy, like Georgiann did, to remove their internal testes. Although providers justify these recommendations by claiming that removal of internal testes reduces the risk of testicular cancer, these claims are not empirically supported (Nakhla et al. 2013). Instead, as we and others have argued elsewhere, such "normalization" surgeries are not medically necessary but rather are recommended by medical practitioners in order to uphold a sex/gender binary that insists, for example, that women should not have testes (Davis 2015; Feder 2014; Holmes 2008; Karkazis 2008; Preves 2003; Reis 2009). This insistence on enforcing

a sex/gender binary in the face of obvious and consistent sex/gender diversity is no doubt related to an overarching social system in which heterosexuality is deemed normative. If sexual identity were not a concern, diversity of sex development (in the case of intersex) or of gender identity (in the case of trans*) would be of far less concern to medical providers and others.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, people with intersex traits began organizing to challenge the medically unnecessary interventions providers were performing on intersex babies and children to shoehorn intersex people into the male/female sex binary, planting the seeds of a global intersex rights movement (see Preves 2005). Such “social surgeries” were first conducted on intersex infants and children as early as the nineteenth century, if not before (see Warren 2014). Initially, as we describe in detail later, intersex activists engaged in confrontational mobilization strategies that involved public protests at medical conferences and media appearances where they shared their horrific experiences of medical trauma, notably stories about their diagnosis and the medically unnecessary and irreversible interventions they were subjected to as children. Today, intersex advocacy has shifted to a more collaborative model to promote social change; that is, a mobilization strategy where at least some intersex activists are collaborating with medical allies to bring about change in intersex medical care. This strategy of working within medicine to promote change occurs more frequently in the United States than in other countries, where it is more often than not contested as a viable strategy for changing intersex medical care.

Georgiann and Sharon have come together to write this piece as a critical reflection on intersex that explores the past, present, and potential future of U.S. intersex advocacy. We focus specifically on intersex advocacy in the United States because that is where our expertise resides. The questions we explore in this reflection are why and how did intersex advocacy come to be? In what ways is intersex advocacy different today than it was in the past? In what ways is it similar? And how might the visibility of intersex in mainstream youth media affect the lives of the next generation of intersex people?

THE RISE OF THE INTERSEX RIGHTS MOVEMENT: CHALLENGING THE MEDICAL TREATMENT OF INTERSEX, 1993–2003

Intersex is a relatively new area of sociocultural inquiry. Outside of medicine, relatively few people have studied intersex, in part due to the fact intersex

people were rather invisible until the global intersex rights movement was formed toward the end of the twentieth century. One reason for this invisibility is that when providers told people that they were intersexed, and they often did not, they also typically informed them that their anatomical differences were extremely rare and that they were unlikely to ever meet another person with a similar anatomical trait. Providers commonly withheld the intersex diagnosis from their patients, lying to them to allegedly protect their gender identity development (i.e., how young children develop a sense of self as feminine or masculine). Medical providers encouraged their patients’ parents to do the same, an experience Georgiann knows firsthand. When Georgiann was a teenager, she had surgery to remove what she was told by her providers and parents were precancerous, underdeveloped ovaries. In actuality, as mentioned earlier, providers removed her internal testes for a medically unnecessary reason: to ensure that a girl didn’t have testes. Georgiann’s testes were producing the majority of her body’s sex hormones. By removing them, providers left her dependent on synthetic hormone replacement therapy for the rest of her life to replace what her testes were already producing naturally. These hormones are essential to prevent people from developing osteoporosis or other potentially debilitating physical ailments.

Intersex medicalization gained the attention of feminist scholars in the early 1990s. For example, in a 1993 article titled “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling refuted the widely accepted assumption that sex was a simple two-category phenomenon consisting only of “females” and “males.” If we are going to categorize people into sex categories, Fausto-Sterling maintained in a tongue-to-cheek tone, then we must expand the sex binary to include true-hermaphrodites, male pseudo-hermaphrodites, and female pseudo-hermaphrodites. Social psychologist Suzanne Kessler (1998) further warned that the expansion of biological sex to five categories wouldn’t suffice, for it rested on the assumption that people’s sex could indeed be categorized. Rather than expand the available sex categories, Kessler argued for the recognition of the diversity of sex development. Later, in 2000, Fausto-Sterling accepted Kessler’s critique in a piece she titled “The Five Sexes, Revisited.”

By the early 2000s, Sharon was well on her way to documenting how intersex people were treated by medical providers and, more generally, how they live with their intersex traits. It was 1993 when Sharon was a first-year medical sociology doctoral student at the University of California, San Francisco, when she was

assigned Fausto-Sterling's "Five Sexes" article in a Gender and Science seminar. She was simultaneously enrolled in a seminar on Medicine and the Family that semester for which she began a literature review to explore how parents made sex assignment and gender rearing decisions when their children were born intersex. What she found was a complete lack of discussion of this topic, or of intersex at all, in the sociology, social work, and psychology literature. When she extended her research to the medical literature, Sharon was shocked to find numerous reports of surgical sex assignment on seemingly healthy infants and children. These reports focused on the physical, rather than the psychosocial, outcomes of medical intervention, and many of them contained disturbing, grainy black and white photos of children's genitals or full naked bodies with their eyes blocked out (in an apparent attempt to protect their identities). Curiously, the majority of these publications didn't report long-term longitudinal follow-up with the patients about their gender and sexual identities or any quality-of-life measures; they were primarily limited to preadolescent reports. It was these alienating photographs coupled with a complete lack of quality-of-life outcomes that compelled Sharon to search further for the voices and stories behind these photos. She decided to document the experiences of intersex adults, including their long-term quality of life and psychosocial health. As a result of her systematic sociological analysis, Sharon produced a number of publications, including her book *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self* (2003). This book provided the very first in-depth account of intersex experiences. It was in *Intersex and Identity* that we learned that contemporary intersex people felt isolated and stigmatized by medical providers—feelings that were minimized when these same people were able to connect with others who were intersex to offer peer support. We also learned that intersex people felt physically and emotionally harmed by the irreversible intersex "normalization" interventions of early surgery, ongoing examinations, and hormone treatments.

Although a handful of intersex people and their parents were connecting through support groups in the 1980s, the U.S. intersex community truly emerged in the early 1990s after Bo Laurent, using the pseudonym Cheryl Chase to protect her identity, founded the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA). Chase founded ISNA by publishing a letter to the editor of the journal *The Sciences* (Chase 1993). She wrote this letter in direct response to Fausto-Sterling's article "The Five Sexes." In her letter, Chase critiqued intersex medical sex assignment as destructive, raising concerns about

the ethics and effectiveness of surgical procedures that impair sexual and psychological function. In the last line of her letter, Chase noted her affiliation with ISNA, an organization she fabricated in that very letter to increase her legitimacy. In her signature line, Chase listed a mailing address for ISNA at a San Francisco post office box. Much to her surprise, she soon began receiving mail from intersex people around the world and decided to form the Intersex Society of North America in earnest.

ISNA published the first issue of its newsletter, cleverly titled *Hermaphrodites with Attitude*, in the winter of 1994 (Intersex Society of North America 1994). By the time this first issue was published, ISNA had already established a mailing list that included recipients in fourteen of the United States and five countries. The political content of the publication, and the organization itself, worked to transform intersex, including the word *hermaphrodite*, from being a source of shame into a source of pride and empowerment. In other words, intersex activists were reclaiming intersex and hermaphrodite terminologies. The newsletter consisted primarily of personal stories, essays, poetry, and humor, providing formerly isolated individuals with the means to connect with others who had similar experiences. *Hermaphrodites with Attitude* was published from 1994 to 1999.

In addition to its newsletter, ISNA also provided support groups, a popular website, and annual retreats. Early on, ISNA's mission was divided between providing peer support to its members and its objective of medical reform. While other intersex organizations chose to address the mission of support as their primary focus, ISNA ultimately decided to pursue social change. The political action of ISNA members alienated them from some other intersex people and groups.

ISNA made deliberate appeals to queer activists, press outlets, and medical organizations, framing intersex as an issue of gender and sexuality. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activist organizations, both in and outside of medicine, could easily relate to intersex grievances of stigma, shame, and alienation. At the same time, aligning intersex issues with sexual or gender minorities compromised intersex activists' ability to establish credibility with the non-LGBT medical mainstream, who viewed heterosexual normalcy as one of the primary objectives of intersex medical sex assignment.

In September 1996, former U.S. House Representative Patricia Schroeder's (D. Colorado) anti-female genital mutilation (FGM) bill became law. This law banned genital cutting on girls under the age of 18 in

the United States except in cases where “health” demands its necessity, thus allowing for intersex “emergencies” to be exempt. Press coverage of this law included a front-page article in the *New York Times*. Chase and other members of ISNA were outraged by the law’s complicit endorsement of intersex genital surgeries. They began to stage protests to draw attention not only to this law’s loophole but to “intersex genital mutilation” (IGM) as well (Preves 2003, 2005).

In addition to lobbying members of Congress to extend the anti-FGM bill to include IGM, ISNA staged protests at medical conferences. ISNA’s first major protest was at the 1996 American Academy of Pediatrics meeting in Boston. Members of ISNA joined with noted trans* activist Riki Anne Wilchins and members of Transsexual Menace for this event, collectively calling themselves “Hermaphrodites with Attitude” (HWA). They picketed the conference after intersex activists were denied floor time to address the doctors in attendance. ISNA representatives used the name HWA frequently during the 1990s when they engaged in protests (Preves 2003, 2005). This historic 1996 protest in Boston propelled the American Academy of Pediatrics to create a position statement on infant and childhood genital surgery (Committee on Genetics 2000). By 1997, the broader medical community began engaging in a debate about best practices for intersex infants and children, largely in response to the first reports of David Reimer’s unsuccessful sex/gender reassignment, which served to discredit the validity of what is now known as the “optimum gender of rearing” (OGR) model (Money, Hampson, and Hampson 1957). The OGR model “held that *all* sexually ambiguous children should—indeed *must*—be made into unambiguous-looking boys or girls to ensure unambiguous gender identities” (Dreger and Herndon 2009:202).

David Reimer and his identical twin brother were born in 1965, as typical, non-intersex boys. During a circumcision accident at the age of eight months, David’s penis was tragically burned off by electrocautery. His devastated parents worked with psychologist John Money, the primary clinician who developed the OGR model, to help their child live a healthy life. Dr. Money suggested bringing about optimal gender identity development through a surgical castration and social reassignment of David as female when he was twenty-two months old. For decades following his reassignment, the medical intervention on intersex children relied on the apparent successful outcome of this case until David spoke out against his sex reassignment in 1997 (Colapinto 1997, 2000). David had

rejected the female-feminine gender that he had been assigned and had been living as a boy since the age of fourteen. He reported that the treatments that were intended to bring about a feminine gender identity were, in fact, a cause of great stigma, isolation, and shame. Despite being a very private person, he was motivated to speak out publicly after learning that other children were being subjected to the same treatments he received and that his case had been lauded as evidence of the success of sex reassignment in early childhood. Many intersex adults also decry their childhood medical sex assignment when they grow up to identify as a gender different than their surgical sex. Many of these intersex adults choose to physically transition their sex, as David Reimer did and many trans*-identified individuals do, so that their sex is congruent with their gender identity. The rate of intersex adults that are also trans* isn’t well known. In Sharon’s 2003 study, nearly 25% of her interviewees were living in a gender different from their medical sex assignment.

Medical debates about the efficacy of surgical and hormonal sex assignment of intersex children quickly followed the headlines of Reimer’s male identity and the apparent failure of Dr. Money’s optimal gender rearing model (Preves 2005). These debates were quite polarized and framed the issue at hand as whether to perform *immediate* or *delayed* medical treatment; that is, these discussions focused on *when* and not *whether* to intervene, and many physicians felt that they were being put on the defensive. In more recent years, some physicians have begun to advocate watchful waiting rather than emergency medical intervention in an appeal for additional and more systematic longitudinal research on intersex children and adults.

This debate came to a head in 2000 and was described as a crisis in medicine by physicians who had formerly considered this treatment to be in the best interest of intersex children and their families. The North American Task Force on Intersex was formed in 2000 with the intention of open and interdisciplinary collaboration and an aim to reach some consensus on best practices in intersex care. The membership of the task force included key players in the American Academy of Pediatrics and ISNA, as well as scholars and clinicians in many related fields (Preves 2005). While the task force was not long-lived, some of the conversations were, ultimately leading to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) issuing a program announcement in 2001 for funding dedicated to new and continued research on intersex. Well over a decade later, the NIH continues to dedicate resources to and requests

for research on culturally competent care for intersex people and their families.

As ISNA sought credibility in medical circles by shedding its former confrontational “Hermaphrodites with Attitude” activism, it retooled itself to put forth an image more conducive to collaboration with medical providers. This included the publication of its new newsletter, *ISNA News*, in 2001, in place of its more radical *Hermaphrodites with Attitude* publication (Intersex Society of North America 2001). In addition to the newsletter’s change in title, *ISNA News* moved away from the personal stories and humor that were commonplace in *Hermaphrodites with Attitude* to more professional and organizational concerns such as financial reports, profiles of board members, and continued coverage of medical conferences and research. This shift mirrors an overarching change within the intersex movement at the beginning of the twenty-first century when at least some intersex activists and doctors began working alongside one another for change rather than against each other as political adversaries. A mere four years after picketing outside of such conventions, Cheryl Chase began to be featured as an invited keynote speaker at prominent medical conventions (Preves 2005).

ISNA distanced itself even further from a narrative of personal medical trauma when Chase stepped down as the executive director and a non-intersex medical sociologist, Monica Casper, took the helm for one year, from 2003 to 2004. Chase stepped back in to serve as ISNA’s executive director in 2004 until ISNA closed down in 2008. During her time at ISNA, Casper helped connect the intersex movement’s concerns to other movements and communities, including women’s health, disability rights, children’s rights, sexual rights, and reproductive rights. She also helped expand ISNA’s Medical Advisory Board, on which Sharon served from 2005 to 2008.

HOW INTERSEX BECAME A “DISORDER OF SEX DEVELOPMENT”: TERMINOLOGICAL TENSIONS, 2004–2014

In October 2005, a few years before ISNA ceased operations, two medical providers convened a meeting in Chicago of fifty experts on intersex from around the world. This international group of experts consisted of medical specialists from various fields and two intersex activists, including Cheryl Chase. This meeting produced the very first consensus statement on the medical management of intersex conditions, which

was published in various scholarly medical outlets (see Houk et al. 2006; Lee et al. 2006). According to meeting attendees, the consensus statement, which was a revision of the earlier American Academy of Pediatrics statement in 2000 (Committee on Genetics 2000), was necessary due to medical advances in intersex care and the recognition of the value of psychosocial support and patient advocacy to overall quality of life (Lee et al. 2006). This new statement made a number of recommendations, including avoiding unnecessary surgical intervention, especially cosmetic genital surgery. The authors also questioned the claim that early surgical intervention “relieves parental distress and improves attachment between the child and the parents” (Lee et al. 2006:491). Although this statement was promising, there was still no guarantee that medical professionals would follow its recommendations (and indeed, few have).

A second recommendation of the 2006 “Consensus Statement on Management of Intersex Disorders” was the call for an interdisciplinary team approach to treating individuals with intersex traits (Lee et al. 2006). This approach calls for various pediatric specialists, including endocrinology, surgery, psychiatry, and others, to collaborate when making medical recommendations and providing intersex medical care. While this team model seems like a step in the right direction away from Dr. John Money’s OGR model that dominated much of the second half of the twentieth century, in *Contesting Intersex*, Georgiann questions the ability of this team model to account for the voices of intersex people and/or their parents (Davis 2015). Although the goal of this concentrated expertise is to provide a multidisciplinary approach to intersex medical care, it may work to intimidate intersex people and their parents through the illusion that every concern has been addressed by a diverse group of medical experts.

Perhaps the most controversial component of the consensus statement is the recommended shift away from intersex language and all uses of hermaphrodite terminology. The authors of the consensus statement claim that patients disapprove of such terms, and they also allege providers and parents find such language “confusing” (Lee et al. 2006:488). In place of intersex language and hermaphrodite terminology, the authors advocate for disorders of sex development (DSD) nomenclature. The introduction of DSD language created new conflict in the intersex community, which compelled Georgiann to bridge her personal and professional interests in intersex by conducting a sociological analysis of intersex in contemporary U.S. society during her doctoral studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. As she first argued in a 2014 paper

titled “The Power in a Name: Diagnostic Terminology and Diverse Experiences,” many intersex people are adamantly against the DSD label due to the pathologization the word *disorder* implies (Davis 2014). A recent study that appeared in the *International Journal of Pediatric Endocrinology* shows that parents of intersex children also express dissatisfaction with DSD terminology (Lin-Su et al. 2015). However, there are intersex people, and their parents, who prefer DSD terminology because of an internalized belief, problematic or not, that the word *disorder* is an accurate medical description of the intersex body, referring to a disruption in typical gestational development (Davis 2014, 2015). A minority of intersex people feel that individuals should use whatever term makes them feel most comfortable, be it *intersex* or *DSD* (Dreger and Herndon 2009). Indeed, as we have illustrated earlier in discussing the Intersex Society’s use of the phrase “hermaphrodites with attitude,” language can be an immensely powerful tool used deliberately to affect emotions and one’s sense, or lack of, social control.

Having flexibility around terminology might be the most strategic approach, for it allows intersex people to benefit from all that each term provides (Davis 2015). For instance, when evoking DSD terminology, intersex people could benefit from insurance access to requested medical resources, government protection against discriminatory actions in the workplace, and more positive relationships with providers, parents, and society at large due to a societal norm of empathy for those with medical abnormalities. Although it certainly is the case that people with disabilities are subjected to discrimination (Green et al. 2005; Kumar et al. 2014), they are a legally protected class of citizens. Intersex people, on the other hand, are not legally protected in any capacity, but by medicalizing their difference, this could change.³ There are, of course, serious problems with embracing DSD language. Intersex people who prefer DSD terminology express feelings of abnormality, and, more specifically, serious doubts about their gender authenticity (Davis 2015). For example, some women with CAIS wonder if they are “really” women given they were born with XY chromosomes and testes. Indeed, it is easy to see why accepting the label of being “disordered” could have negative consequences on one’s sense of self. If, however, intersex people can be flexible with diagnostic terminology, acknowledging that there may even be power embedded in seemingly pejorative labels such as DSD (e.g., in seeking health insurance coverage for medically recommended hormone replacement therapy, protection from employment discrimination, and the like), they may be empowered to use such language to their advantage.

This is precisely why Georgiann argues for flexibility around terminology in her book *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis* (2015). To effectively view and use diagnostic terminology in this flexible manner, one must be able to see medical diagnoses as a socially constructed phenomenon (see, e.g., Jutel 2011).

Other scholars across disciplines have offered different interpretations of the “disorders of sex development” terminology. Some have openly criticized it (see, e.g., Davidson 2009; Holmes 2009; Karkazis 2008; Reis 2009; Topp 2013). Historian Elizabeth Reis (2009) has, for example, offered “divergence of sex development” as an alternative to “disorders of sex development,” and communication scholar Sarah Topp (2013) has supported “differences of sex development.” Philosopher Ellen Feder (2009b) has argued that “the [nomenclature] change should be understood as normalizing in a positive sense” (134). She has also more directly stated that DSD “could be understood as progressive” (Feder 2009a:226). Sociologist Alyson Spurgas (2009) warns that “the DSD/intersex debate and its associated contest over treatment protocol has consequences for embodied (and thus sexed, gendered and desiring) individuals everywhere” (118). Sharon Preves suggests adopting the phrase “diversity of sex development” when using the DSD acronym.

Medical professionals, on the other hand, have widely embraced the disorders of sex development terminology, although a minority of providers have very recently started using the term *differences* rather than *disorders* of sex development, recommended by Topp (2013). Research demonstrates that providers may have embraced the DSD language because it allowed them to reclaim their medical authority and jurisdiction over intersex, which was in jeopardy as a result of the intersex activism of the 1990s and 2000s (Davis 2015). By referring to *intersex* as a DSD, providers escape criticism from intersex activists and their allies who call for the end of intersex “normalization” surgeries—indeed, in a game of semantics, providers can now claim that they treat *disorders of sex development*, not *intersex*. In 2010, only four years after the consensus statement was published, several medical providers noted that DSD nomenclature had successfully replaced intersex language and hermaphrodite terminology (Aaronson and Aaronson 2010; Hughes 2010a, 2010b; Pasterski, Prentice, and Hughes 2010). But this was never Chase’s goal when she participated in the 2005 Chicago “consensus meeting.” Rather, by adopting DSD terminology, she had hoped that “disorders of sex development” language would replace only terminology that used or incorporated

forms of the word *hermaphrodite*, such as *male pseudo-hermaphrodite*, not all uses of the term *intersex*. While Hughes and other providers frame this renaming as an all-encompassing and victimless victory, we must not forget that they are speaking from a medical perspective rather than from the perspective of those personally affected by intersex traits. This shift in diagnostic language has had major implications throughout the global intersex community, marking a shift in intersex advocacy from collective confrontation against the medical profession to contested collaboration with the medical community (Davis 2015).

This change in nomenclature spawned the death of ISNA and the birth of a new organization in 2008: Accord Alliance. Accord Alliance was also formed by Cheryl Chase in collaboration with other former ISNA leaders and allies. When she co-founded this new organization, Chase used her legal name, Bo Laurent, rather than her pseudonym and formally retired the activist pseudonym “Cheryl Chase.” Whereas Accord Alliance embraces the disorders of sex development terminology, many other intersex organizations, activists, scholars, and even some clinicians do not. This debate over terminology is currently a very heated issue among people concerned with this topic. Today Accord Alliance continues to work alongside medical professionals to help educate and build bridges between parents with intersex children and medical providers who specialize in this field (www.accordalliance.org).

A second intersex organization that formed to fill ISNA’s void is Advocates for Informed Choice (AIC), with its youth advocacy program InterAct (<http://aiclegal.org/>). AIC was formed in 2006 by legal advocate Anne Tamar-Mattis, the partner of Dr. Suegee Tamar-Mattis, a physician who happens to be intersex. AIC is first and foremost a legal advocacy organization fighting for the human rights of intersex children. AIC also sponsors several programs, including the Interface Project, which is an advocacy campaign curated by Jim Ambrose, a long-time intersex advocate who was involved with the ISNA in the 1990s. Ambrose’s Interface Project features brief first-person video accounts of people with intersex traits discussing their experiences and belief that “No Body Is Shameful.” (These videos are reminiscent of the “It Gets Better” video campaign.) With representation from around the world, fourteen intersex people, including Georgiann, have contributed their voices via these brief autobiographical video accounts (www.interfaceproject.org).

Since ISNA’s closure in 2008, the AIS-DSD Support Group has grown into one of the largest intersex support groups in the world, with membership now extending to those with intersex traits other than androgen insensitivity syndrome. Sherri Groveman Morris, an intersex woman, founded the AIS-DSD Support Group in 1995 so that women with androgen insensitivity syndrome wouldn’t have to face their diagnosis alone. Organizational membership was initially only open to women with androgen insensitivity syndrome. The organization was, at the time it was formed, named the Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group-USA (AISSG-USA), after its sister intersex support group in the United Kingdom, AISSG-UK. In 2010, the then-named AISSG-USA started hosting a Continuing Medical Education (CME) event the day before its annual conference, during which medical experts on intersex would share their knowledge with interested parties, including medical residents, other physicians, and even some intersex activists. AISSG-USA became the AIS-DSD Support Group in the summer of 2011, when it launched its new website (www.aisdsd.org). This organizational name change made the group more inclusive by extending its membership to people with intersex traits besides AIS.

On January 1, 2014, Georgiann started a two-year term as president of the AIS-DSD Support Group. Since her presidency, Georgiann has worked with the AIS-DSD Support Group Board to continue to diversify the organization and has since witnessed several transformations. First, in late 2014, the AIS-DSD Support Group voted to open membership to anyone personally affected by intersex, regardless of gender identity or expression—that is, opening up group membership to men with intersex traits and to people with intersex traits who identify as genderqueer (those who reject conventional gender roles and expectations) or who reject gender labels altogether. This was a remarkable development as the organization previously had a strict women-only policy, with the exception of male parents of children with AIS. This change was inspired by a keynote address that Bo Laurent (the activist formerly known as Cheryl Chase) delivered at the 2012 AIS-DSD Support Group annual meeting that challenged the organization to include men born with intersex traits. This challenge became personal in 2013, when a teen member of the AIS-DSD Support Group decided to gender transition. Without changing the existing policy, this young man would not have been able to attend the annual meeting the following year. Many members considered it unethical and

inappropriate to deny support to this young man and his family because he had gender transitioned, a sentiment that played a significant role in expanding organizational membership to include all intersex people, not just those who identify as women. Second, also in 2014, the AIS-DSD Support Group took a terminological stance and replaced “disorders of sex development” with “differences of sex development” language across their website and other publications. This change was made to prevent the problematic pathologization inherent within the “disorders of sex development” terminology. Third, in 2015, the AIS-DSD Support Group Board convened a Diversity Committee, which is committed to increasing the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of its membership. Currently, the Diversity Committee is in the early stages of formulating concrete action plans.

Accord Alliance, AIC, and the AIS-DSD Support Group are just three of many intersex support and advocacy groups that exist around the world. We have chosen to focus on these three intersex advocacy organizations because they are among the most visible, especially in the United States. (With its online biographical video Interface Project, AIC also has international representation, and the AIS-DSD Support Group conference has attendees from outside the United States.) Although each of these organizations serves a unique purpose in the intersex rights movement, they share the goal of improving the lives of intersex people and their families. AIC and the AIS-DSD Support Group often collaborate with one another. For example, AIC and the AIS-DSD Support Group have overlapping leadership, and AIC has sponsored the AIS-DSD Support Group’s youth program for the past few years. Each of these three organizations has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, in part due to the void created by ISNA’s closure in 2008. Despite their collaboration and shared goals, they remain independent organizations with varying perceptions about the effectiveness of partnering with medical professionals to promote change in intersex medical care.

THE FUTURE OF THE INTERSEX MOVEMENT AND MEDICAL CARE: 2015 AND BEYOND

Intersex individuals came together to form the U.S. intersex rights movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They mobilized in order to change intersex medical care that was based on John Money’s “optimum

gender of rearing” model. These activists represented the first generation of adults who had been subjected to intersex “normalization” surgeries and the secrecy and shame that surround such treatment. They demanded that medical providers stop performing “normalization” surgeries on intersex babies and young children. They also wanted providers to stop lying to intersex people about their diagnoses and encouraging parents to do the same. These activists wanted to raise public awareness about intersex through numerous venues including media appearances, talks at universities, and LGBT centers.

Although intersex babies and children are still subjected to “normalization” surgeries (see Davis 2015), it appears that now it is far less common for intersex people to be lied to about their diagnosis. Today, it seems that providers no longer instruct parents of intersex children to withhold an intersex diagnosis from their child. This is evidence of change because it likely minimizes at least some of the shame and secrecy tied to the lack of complete and honest diagnosis disclosure. However, many intersex people still struggle with their diagnosis, with some questioning their gender authenticity (Davis 2015).

The ethics of intersex “normalization” surgery, including medical liability for performing such interventions, is currently being determined in the courtroom. In 2013, Pamela and John Mark Crawford filed a lawsuit, in both federal and state courts, against the South Carolina Department of Social Services, the Greenville Hospital System, the Medical University of South Carolina, and specifically named individual employees on behalf of their adopted eight-year-old son, M.C., who was born with an intersex trait (Project Integrity 2013). Before the Crawfords adopted M.C., he was in the South Carolina foster care system, where medical providers, with the support of social service employees, performed surgery on him at the age of sixteen months to address his intersex trait. According to the lawsuit, the surgery removed “healthy genital tissue” with the result of feminizing his body, “potentially sterilizing him and greatly reducing if not eliminating his sexual function” (Project Integrity 2013). Despite undergoing this infant medical sex assignment to make him appear outwardly female, M.C. clearly and strongly identifies as male. While the federal portion of this lawsuit has been dismissed in court, the state suit against specific state entities and individuals is still in litigation.

Another significant recent development has been the unprecedented increase in the number of intersex people, and their parents, who are able to find and

connect with each other, seek support, and organize to make up the second generation of intersex activists. This can almost exclusively be attributed to the expansion of various social media outlets, notably Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter. For example, every active intersex social movement organization has a Facebook page that is easily located on the Internet. As another example, an intersex man created a Facebook page titled “The Commons” that allows intersex people, their parents, medical allies, and sociocultural scholars to connect with each other outside of a formal intersex social movement organization. While “The Commons” is a private Facebook group that one must be invited to join by its founder or one of its moderators, it is a virtual space for intersex people, and their allies from all around the world, to connect with each one another.

The third generation of intersex activists comprises youth born near or after 1990. These youth are coming of age at a time when there is growing societal acceptance of diverse gender and sexual identities, and also greater visibility of intersex in mainstream youth media. Many of these young people are connected through AIC’s youth program titled *Inter/Act*, an advocacy and support program for intersex people between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five (<http://interactyouth.org/>). Members of *Inter/Act*, and its program coordinators, were heavily involved as consultants on the second (2014–2015) season of MTV’s *Faking It*, a popular television show among youth. In the second season of the show, it was revealed that Lauren, one of the show’s main characters, was intersex. This marked the first time that a major television program featured an intersex character. In addition, second-generation intersex activists who were, directly or indirectly, affiliated with *Inter/Act*, appeared in an immensely popular BuzzFeed video titled “What It’s Like to Be Intersex” (BuzzFeed 2015). Within six weeks of its release on YouTube, in March 2015, this video had already amassed more than one million views. Just eight weeks later, at the time of this publication, the views number more than four million. It is likely that this visibility of intersex in mainstream youth media has profoundly impacted how younger intersex people see themselves and how their peers perceive and interact with them.

Since the formation of the U.S. intersex rights movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Sharon was just beginning to shed light on the lives of intersex people and their struggles, there has been considerable change. Unfortunately, this progress has been

limited primarily to the expansion of peer support and means of advocacy, notably the use of social media. Georgiann’s recent work reveals that intersex people continue to be subjected to “normalization” surgeries, struggle to receive quality medical care, and experience stigma surrounding their bodily difference.

The intersex social movement is situated within the larger context of social change with regard to gender and sexual diversity. In the United States, for example, thirty-seven states legalized same-sex marriage within an eleven-year period (from 2004 to 2015), and in June 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court made same-sex marriage legal throughout the entire country. On the gender diversity front, trans* visibility and acceptance has increased in the 2010s. This social change was propelled in part by the wildly popular Netflix show *Orange Is the New Black* featuring a leading trans* character portrayed by a trans* actor (Laverne Cox). The show premiered in 2013 and Ms. Cox became a household name just a year later when she appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* in a feature article titled “The Transgender Tipping Point” (Steinmetz 2014). In 2015, major media gave attention to other trans* celebrities, including Caitlyn (formerly Bruce) Jenner’s televised coming out on *20/20* and her appearance on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine.

The increasing visibility of gender and sexual diversity has been coupled with recent public attention to intersex issues. This has occurred not only through the MTV show *Faking It* but also through the global attention to intersex raised by the International Olympics Committee reinstating gender verification of female athletes in 2012 and Germany becoming the first country to allow an indeterminate gender on a newborn’s birth certificate. The future of the intersex movement is likely to be more global than it has in the past, given the vast power of the Internet and social media to connect people throughout the world. Our hope is that the stigma intersex people face will be diminished for future generations as they come of age at a time when there is, for the first time ever, substantial intersex visibility in the mainstream media.

NOTES

1. AIS-DSD Support Group is the official name of this organization. *AIS* stands for androgen insensitivity syndrome, whereas *DSD* stands for differences (not disorders) of sex development. www.aisdsd.org.

2. We would like to thank the editors of this volume, Kay Valentine and Joan Spade, for the opportunity to write

this article. Georgiann and Sharon represent two generations of scholars who have been working separately on intersex advocacy and (de)medicalization for many years. It is an honor and joy for us to come together to write this historical narrative.

3. While intersex is not a protected legal class, the Human Rights Commission of the City and County of San Francisco issued a human rights–based investigation into the medical “normalization” of intersex people in 2005 (Arana 2005). This investigation was largely compelled by the activism of Cheryl Chase and other members of ISNA.

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Introduction to Reading 4

Carla A. Pfeffer's research is based on in-depth interviews with nontransgender (cis) women partners of transgender men from the United States, Canada, and Australia. The results of her data analysis are reported in detail in this reading. Pfeffer's findings demonstrate the powerful potential of the relationships and identities constructed by the people she interviewed to challenge the sex/gender/sexuality binaries that have been the foundation of binary thinking and acting in Western societies such as the United States. Pfeffer applies the idea of "recognition" to show how we "do" both gender and sexuality. Her study poses a direct challenge to the belief that sexual, as well as gender, identities are fixed and natural.

1. Why does Pfeffer refer to the people she interviewed as "queer social actors"?
2. Why does the author use the concept of "recognition" instead of "passing" in her analysis?
3. How do cis women and their trans partners work to (re)define their identities in ways that challenge linguistic and social categories?
4. What is queer theory, and how is it used in this reading?

“I DON’T LIKE PASSING AS A STRAIGHT WOMAN”

QUEER NEGOTIATIONS OF IDENTITY AND SOCIAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Carla A. Pfeffer

Despite broader social acknowledgment of gender and sexual diversity, transgender individuals and their significant others remain relatively unrecognized in both mainstream and academic discourse and are often subsumed under the limited theoretical frame of social “passing” when they do appear. Building a sociological critique against overly simplified biological frameworks for understanding complex gender and sexual identities, I analyze in-depth interviews with nontransgender women partners of transgender men. The personal identifications and experiences of this group of “queer” social actors are proposed as sociopolitically distinguishable from those of other more commonly recognized sexual minority groups. Data reveal the interactive social processes that often determine “rightful” social inclusion and exclusion across gender and sexual identity categories as well as their capacities to generate and limit possibilities for social movements and political solidarity.

. . . The present study proposes cis women partners of trans men as queer social actors,¹ arguing that a more developed understanding of this understudied group may fruitfully extend sociological knowledge on contemporary sexual identity groups and communities.² The present work broadens the notion of “queer,” as a politics established against identity, considering the ways in which “queer,” as a relational subjectivity, usefully complicates our understanding of social identities and social group-based membership. In this way, the present study is a move toward theorizing particular queer social actors, identities, social embodiments, and families as embedded within intersecting normative and regulatory social systems, structures, and institutions.

An exploration of the identities and experiences of cis women partners of trans men also provokes consideration of the complex management processes involved in negotiating both individual identity and social group-based memberships. A critical aspect of these social processes is being seen or not seen, recognized or not recognized, as a rightful member of particular social

identity groups with which one identifies. For trans men and their cis women partners, these meaningful social recognition processes often include (sometimes unintentional or even undesired) social “passing” with regard to gender and sexual orientation.

A problematic aspect of many of the sociological studies employing this notion of “passing” is their tendency to reinforce the presumed essentiality of sex and gender binaries by assuming that some social actors hold authentic proprietary claims over particular social identity-group membership (e.g., only those categorized as “male” at birth can be “authentic” or “real” men), while others can stake only inauthentic or false claims. Indeed, it is only under such a framework that it makes sense that some individuals might be recognized as authentically (and therefore unremarkably) “belonging” as members, while others may only hope to “pass” into relatively inauthentic membership as wannabes. Notions of “passing,” therefore, tend to be predicated upon assumptions of essentialized and naturalized group difference.

. . . In this article, I draw upon Connell’s (2009) notion of “recognition” (in lieu of “passing”) to argue that social rights, privileges, and group membership connected to categories of sex, gender, and sexuality depend largely upon social interpellation. More specifically, I will demonstrate how gender and sexual identities are interactional accomplishments that often reveal more about the workings of normative social privilege than they reveal about the social actors whose gender and sexual identities are being (mis)-recognized. This study considers queer social actors’ often strategic and pragmatic management of these (mis)recognition processes to gain access to particular social and material benefits of social group membership, offering theoretical and empirical insights on identity negotiations, and moments of “trouble” in these negotiations, across contested and regulated social categories and groups more broadly. As such, this work provides insights that actively respond to Irvine’s (1994, p. 245) still-relevant

Pfeffer, C. (2014). “I don’t like passing as a straight woman”: Queer negotiations of identity and social group membership. *American Journal of Sociology*, 120(1): 1–44. Reprinted with permission from The University of Chicago Press.

call to sociologists nearly two decades earlier: “Sociological theory must . . . [place] social categories such as sexuality and race in the foreground in the context of power and difference.” Finally, this work proposes a sociological queer analytic framework that compels solidarity-based approaches to social movement organizing around identity-based rights.

TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF QUEER SOCIAL ACTORS AND IDENTITIES: EXTENDING THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Emerging as a late 20th-century outgrowth of post-structuralist thought, a central analytic across much queer theory is its critique of notions of normativity, deviance, and stable/coherent identities. The interface between queer theory and sociology has been slow to develop.³ Michael Warner, one of the key figures in the development and popularization of academic queer theory, describes social science disciplines’ reticence to adopt queer theoretical frames as paradoxical given that “the analysis of normativity . . . should have become central to such disciplines” (2012, p. 8). Epstein (1994, p. 197) writes that displacement of sexual minorities to the periphery rather than the center of social inquiry has had critical limiting effects on the discipline of sociology and that “the challenge that queer theory poses to sociological investigation is precisely in the strong claim that no facet of social life is fully comprehensible without an examination of how sexual meanings intersect with it.”⁴

. . . Seidman (1994) argues that one of queer theory’s central and most defining contributions is the way in which it challenges taken-for-granted assumptions about the existence of a relatively stable homosexual subject and identity. Queer theory and politics embraced (rather than attempted to reconcile) the messiness and fluidity of sexual acts, boundaries, and identities. Indeed, queer politics galvanized those who shared a burgeoning sense of disenfranchisement from (and reaction against) mainstream lesbian and gay politics of “normalization,” generating expressly oppositional politics informed by postmodern and deconstructionist theorizing (Seidman 2001; Bernstein 2005).

Identities as Social Process: Sociological Queer Analysis

. . . As sociologists, rather than ignoring or sidelining critical social analyses of queer social subjects, we might query: What are some of the meaningful social

and political processes that regulate queer social actors’ membership within, or passage through, various identity and social-membership groups? How might sociologists contribute to a project that expands beyond the textual to consider the everyday lives of queer social actors?

Valocchi (2005, p. 766) offers one possible pathway for sociology, defining “sociological queer analysis” as that which blends “a queer sensibility about the performative nature of identity with sociological sensibility about how these performances are constrained, hierarchical, and rooted in social inequality.”⁵ As such, one of the primary goals of the present work is to develop an expressly sociological queer analysis that focuses upon fissures and moments of trouble in culture and identity, articulating the social process through which individuals come to embrace and resist subject identities as “queer” even as these identities are (mis)recognized by social others. The discipline of sociology is perhaps uniquely well positioned to seriously consider the daily lives of queer social actors and to begin to theorize the processes through which these lives and identities are constituted, (mis)recognized, resisted, and embraced. Namaste (1994) urges sociologists to consider the social constructedness of genders and sexualities and the ways in which some are normalized (or left unmarked, as nonqueer), as well as how all social actors negotiate various identities and subject positions (and limits to these identities and subject positions).

. . . Queer social actors, like everyone else, lead lives simultaneously produced through and against normative structures of sex, gender, and sexuality. These normative structuring forces of sex, gender, and sexuality operate primarily along presumably “natural,” biological, and essentialized binaries of male/female, man/woman, and heterosexual/homosexual. The lives and experiences of cis women partners of trans men, however, call these normative structuring binaries into even greater question in their failure to adequately articulate and encapsulate these queer social actors’ identities and social group memberships. The experiences of queer social actors, therefore, hold the potential to rattle the very foundations upon which normative binaries rest, highlighting the increasingly blurry intersections, tensions, and overlaps between sex, gender, and sexual orientation in the 21st century (Pfeffer 2012).

Theorizing Social “(Mis)recognition” Rather Than “Passing”

The incoherence of these normative binaries becomes clearer through focus on interactional

processes by which social actors are granted insider/outsider social status. When individuals refer to someone “passing” as a man or “passing” as a woman, the social meaning making that is taking place lies at the thorny intersections of sex and gender categorization, expression, attribution, and identity (for further discussion of these and other concepts, language, and terminology related to transgender identity and experience, see Wentling et al. [2008]; Pfeffer [2010]). Studies of “passing,” and the social accomplishments of sex and gender, have a long, revered, and contentious history in sociology, particularly among symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists (see Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1976; Kessler and McKenna 1978; West and Zimmerman 1987; Denzin 1990; Rogers 1992; Zimmerman 1992). “Passing” carries the assumption that certain individuals somehow naturally embody particular identities to which others can stake only inauthentic membership claims. In a sense, some individuals are understood as rightful “owners” of membership to particular social identity groups—most notably, those groups holding disproportionate social power and authority (Harris 1993; Calavita 2000).

The concept of passing also relies on juxtaposed notions of conscious, intentional, deceptive “dupers” and presumably natural, authentic, deceived “dupes” (Serano 2007). Nevertheless, “passing” is often held as the gold standard of “successful” transsexualism—particularly by medical establishments; as such, “passing” is often conceptualized as emblematic of normativity or a desire to *be* normative (as reviewed by Connell [2009]). Analyses of “passing” in racial and class contexts (see Harris 1993; Calavita 2000; Kennedy 2002; Ong 2005), however, adopt a more nuanced lens that views “passing” as a potentially pragmatic (though fraught) interactional strategy for accessing and attaining regulated social, material, and legal resources, and consider the personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical effects and consequences that the use of such strategies may involve.

While “passing” may grant reprieve from the social stigma and potential danger of ambiguous gender expression, as well as access to social and material resources granted only to particular group members, this access and these reprieves are often tenuous, context specific, and revocable. Trans men who most always “pass” in ordinary social situations may live in fear about the consequences of being involved in a serious accident during which the removal of clothing (or, in some cases, the accessing of identification records indicating legal sex or gender status) would seriously impair their ability to be unambiguously recognized in accordance with their gender identity.

Employing a sociological queer analysis, the concept of “passing” may be further illuminated by focusing on those ordinarily granted “natural” and unquestioned status within particular identity categories. Elson (2004, p. 172), for example, presents a compelling exploration into cis women’s experience of identity posthysterectomy and whether or not those who undergo this surgical procedure are still considered (and consider themselves) “women” or not—reaching the equivocal conclusion of yes, no, maybe. As such, Elson (2004) probes and destabilizes the supposedly “natural” and essential links between biology, gender identity, and social perceptions of which bodies rightfully constitute “woman.”

Connell (2009) usefully troubles the notion of “passing” to consider how “recognition” may be a more precise conceptual framework for thinking about the juxtapositions between one’s body, subjective identity, social group memberships, and social appraisals of all of these. Accordingly, we would do better to supplant our biologically essentialist notions of “passing” with a more sociological notion of “recognition.” By doing so, we might come to consider and recognize that trans people’s efforts to “pass” occur not when living in accordance with their subjective gender identities, but as they attempt to live within gender identities normatively corresponding to their sex assignment or sex categorization (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 133).⁶ In other words, many trans men do, indeed, “pass” for much of their lives—as girls or as women. They often report struggling, within bodies and social identities that do not feel like “home,” until these efforts become untenable and they take further steps to bring their bodies and social embodiments in line with their gender identity.

As this study will show, sexual identity is also a relationally formed construct, depending upon a constellation of dynamic, shifting, socially informed understandings that individuals hold about themselves and others. As Vidal-Ortiz (2002, p. 192) writes: “One interactional way in which gender and sexuality collide is as people interpret each others’ attractions based on their gender presentations or expressions.” Sexuality is about more than personal identities, autonomous desires, and sexual object choice alone. Rather, we “do sexuality”; our sexualities are interpellated every day, arising from social others’ (mis)recognition of the ways in which we see and understand ourselves and our partners. I argue that we must further extend Connell’s notion of “recognition” to attend not only to the ways in which we may come to see individuals in accordance with how they see themselves but also to the ways in which making any attribution of identity is

part of the process of bringing identities into social being. In other words, by focusing on how we recognize and misrecognize others' self-identities, we come to better understand these identities not as individual and predetermined fixed entities, but as dynamic social processes. . . .

STUDY

Participant Recruitment and Sample

This work represents the largest and most comprehensive study conducted, to date, with cis women partners of trans men (for additional information about the size and growth of this emergent social group, see Pfeffer [2010]). Research participants were recruited using online and paper-flyer postings targeting the significant others, friends, families, and allies of trans men. Most study participants were recruited via Internet-facilitated social network ("snowball") sampling, the primary method of purposeful sampling when targeting sexual minorities and their partners (Patton 1990; Mustanski 2001; Shapiro 2004; Rosser et al. 2007). I also enlisted key informants across the United States and Canada to distribute materials to potential participants in their local regions.

I conducted interviews with 50 cis women partners of trans men for this study. Participants discussed their experiences in 61 individual relationships with trans men (several participants reported multiple relationships with trans men). Participants resided across 13 states in the United States, three Canadian provinces, and one Australian state, expanding existing work on sex and gender minorities that focuses almost exclusively on one or two states, with large urban centers, in the United States. This sample consists of participants from most of the U.S. geographic regions with the highest reported proportions of trans men (see Rosser et al. 2007), including two much under-researched regions with regard to studies of sex and gender minorities—the midwestern United States and Canada. The most frequent sexual orientation self-identification label, used by 50% of participants in this sample, was "queer." Participants' trans partners (according to participant reports) were also most likely to identify as "queer" (48%), with "heterosexual" as second most common (33%). When asked to describe how they would define or label their relationship(s) with their trans partner(s), study participants described their relationships as "queer" 65% of the time among those providing information for this question.

Despite aiming for racial and age diversity, only variation on age was successfully achieved. Interviewees' ages ranged from 18 to 51 years, with an average of 29 years, and, on average, cis women's trans partners were slightly younger. Participants largely self-identified as white. When considering the race/ethnicity of the trans partners of participants, the sample begins to reflect somewhat greater racial/ethnic variation, with 18% identified as "multiracial." Participants and their partners were highly educated (with 24% and 11%, respectively, holding postgraduate degrees) yet reported household incomes that were quite low among participants providing these data. Trans men partners of participants were at various stages of sex or gender transition—with most being just a bit over two years into the process. Most were taking testosterone, a considerable minority had had "top" surgery, while a very slim minority had had "bottom" surgery of any kind. . . .

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: DOING GENDER AND SEXUALITY THROUGH (MIS)RECOGNITION PROCESS

Just as trans men have their own transition experiences to manage on multiple levels, so, too, do their cis women partners (see Nyamora 2004; Pfeffer 2008; Brown 2009; Joslin-Roher and Wheeler 2009; Ward 2010). Study participants relayed, in great detail, the various struggles they experienced as they sought to maintain, transform, understand, proclaim, and refute various personal and social identities in the context of their lives. The following sections present narrative data, using pseudonyms to protect participant confidentiality, illustrating the ways in which queer social actors negotiate intersecting and sometimes conflicting social identities, relationships, politics, and social groups. These narratives prompt consideration of the ways in which gender and sexual identity are interactive social accomplishments involving boundary negotiations and (mis)recognition processes that carry tangible personal and social consequences.

Language and Social "Reading"

"Queer" as a distinct social identity category.—Cis women partners of trans men frequently wondered aloud, when I asked them about their own shifting and contingent sexual identities in relation to their trans partners, "What does that make me?" Martha (25 years, Massachusetts) described the

challenge of personally struggling with issues connected to identity in the context of her relationship with her trans partner:

I thought of myself as a dyke and then now I'm with someone who identifies as a man and I'm thinking—how do I identify now? I'm not a lesbian. . . . I'm not really perceived as queer by many other people right now. And it really messed with me for awhile—what am I? Who am I? Not that I didn't know who I was, but what identity should I give to people? A lot of times I'd try to adopt my identity as my own and it doesn't matter what other people think. But it's hard not to judge myself by other people's judgments.

Having difficulty figuring out how to self-identify was described often by participants in my sample as not only an internal struggle, but one that emerges from various social and cultural imperatives and in social interactions with others. . . .

Another participant, Linda (22 years, Sydney, Australia), explicitly rejected the social imperative to identify her relationship with her partner using particular identity labels: “All these people would go, ‘Oh, what does that make you now?’ And I would say, ‘Happy and in love. That’s all.’ I didn’t see why anything else has to matter.” Current and former lesbian-identified respondents reported facing particular challenges in terms of identity and social/community membership and the attributions others made about their personal motivations, desires, and emotional health. As Polly (40 years, New York) noted: “If you’re a lesbian, everybody works so hard to accept it. They accept it, then you fuck them up by being with a trans guy. And then they’re like, ‘Okay, next she’s going to go to men.’ That it’s just this form of evolution . . . and you’re just graduating in this progressive chain of eventually getting to the pinnacle of the ‘real’ man. I sort of feel like people see it as this progressive growth into being fully, Freudianly, ‘correctly’ socialized to heterosexuality.” Cis women partners of trans men described facing persistent challenges in actively negotiating their own (and their partner’s) shifting identities across a variety of personal, interpersonal, and social contexts. One of the ways in which this negotiation manifested for many participants was through language and determining how they would self-identify, with regard to sexuality, in the context of their unique relationships.

Just over half of the cis women participants in this study self-identified their sexual orientation as “queer” at the point of interview and about 65% described their relationship with their trans partner as “queer.”

According to these cis women’s accounts, over 60% of their trans men partners were perceived as men in social spaces “always” or “almost always.” When in public together, therefore, many cis women in this sample reported being frequently (mis)recognized as part of a heterosexual couple. Verbal evidence participants provided in their accounts of these social encounters included social others using the words “sir,” “bro,” “boyfriend,” “husband,” “dad,” and “father,” as well as pronouns such as “he” and “him” when referring to participants’ trans partners, and use of words/pronouns such as “Miss,” “Mrs.,” “Ms.,” “ma’am,” “girl,” “girlfriend,” “wife,” “mom,” “mother,” “she,” and “her” when referring to the participants themselves. Several participants also described instances in which clerks “corrected” sex designators from “female/f” to “male/m” on their trans partner’s paperwork or in computer records systems, remarking about how there must have been an “error in the system,” upon seeing the man in front of them. This was an important example of the way in which being misrecognized (according to medical or legal systems, which serve as gatekeepers for sex marker designation changes on personal identification documents) and recognized (in accordance with one’s gender identity) may go hand in hand, providing or preventing access to regulated social and material institutions (such as a marriage license).

Nonverbal indicators that trans partners were being socially “read” as men or that the couple was being “read” as heterosexual included the check being consistently handled to one’s trans partner at restaurants and other service establishments, other men giving a head “nod” when passing one’s trans partner on the street, being smiled at by older persons when holding hands with one’s trans partner in public,⁷ and not being scrutinized when in sex-segregated public spaces (such as restrooms). In these instances, (mis)recognition processes often conferred social advantage, privilege, and mainstream acceptance. Yet being (mis)recognized as heterosexual was described as personally and socially problematic by many participants—particularly insofar as they feared being (mis)recognized as “heteronormative” by social others. Participants described their understandings of heteronormativity as fulfilling stereotypically gendered “roles” in their relationships, endorsing majoritarian politics, and not being seen as queer or politically radical.⁸

Self-identifying as “queer,” among study participants, was described as a fraught (though sometimes powerfully political) solution to the inadequacy of other currently existing language choices for

expressing sexual identity in the context of one's relationship with a trans partner:

Before my ex-partner . . . I had been sort of actively claiming that I wasn't straight . . . and I was very comfortable telling people that. But I also come from a small town and the options there were very much "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual" or "straight." I didn't feel that any of those fit me. So I started saying to my friends and to whoever else, "Well, I'm not straight." But that's as far as it went . . . I hadn't had any other partners that would actually complicate that at that point . . . But [once I met my trans ex partner], it just made sense for me to think about identifying as "queer" and that felt comfortable. (Sage, 21 years, Ontario)

Sage's narrative walks us through a process of queer identity consolidation. Sage considers sexual orientation self-identification labels in the context of her own life, coming to the conclusion that none of the existing labels accurately "fit." She first chooses a new identity category rooted in disidentification with an existing identity category ("not straight"). Later, a new relational context (partnering with a trans man) serves as the impetus for self-identifying in yet a new way—adopting an identity label ("queer") that was not part of the original range of self-identification choices of which she was aware or that were available to her. . . .

As this narrative illustrates, for some, choosing to self-identify as "queer" also serves as a conscious and intentional social indicator of a political stance that explicitly resists or rejects normativity in order to imagine a different or transformed social landscape. When asked what identifying as "queer" meant to her, Ani (21 years, Ohio) stated: "I needed a language for *not* being heteronormative." These experiences stand in stark contrast to calls for a "post-queer study of sexuality" (Green 2002, p. 537) in sociology or claims that the term "queer" exists primarily to symbolize a departure from sexual identity categories (Green 2002, 2007). Rather, these participants assert "queer" as one of the few (if not the only) sexual identity categories that does not overly constrain or threaten the relationships they have with their trans partners. Participants told me that self-identifying as "lesbian" in the social world carried the possibility of invalidating their trans partner's identity as a man.

It is possible to connect some of the identity and (mis)recognition struggles of these participants with those of bisexual-identified respondents from other sociological empirical work (Burrill 2001; Wolkomir 2009; Tabatabai and Linders 2011).⁹ Specifically, women across each group described being (mis)recognized by social others in ways inconsonant with their

own sexual self-identifications and in ways that often shifted based upon social assessments of their partner's gender identity in relation to their own. Empirical comparisons between this sample and earlier work on bisexual-identified cis women (Blumstein and Schwartz 1974, 1977, 1990; Richardson and Hart 1981; Ault 1996a, 1996b; Rust 2000) also attest to the fluidity and dynamic potential of sexual identifications. While many participants in my study reported moving from self-identifications as "lesbian" prior to a partner's transition (or partnering with a trans man) to self-identifications as "queer," women in these earlier studies often reported self-identification as lesbian when partnered with another woman and self-identification as heterosexual when partnered with a man, discussing the ways in which shifts in the sex of one's partner resulted in shifts of group membership, community, and sense of belonging. In other words, sexual identity was understood as largely situational and context/partner/community-dependent, rather than individual, inherent, or fixed and immutable.

One primary point of difference between these groups is that among the group of cis women partners of trans men I interviewed, identification as "bisexual" was reportedly an untenable choice for many as it could introduce identity and relationship insecurity through trans partners wondering whether participants were attracted to them as a man or as a woman. Further, very few of the participants in this study self-identified as "heterosexual" (n = 2), with most participants expressly rejecting such self-identification and discussing how much they valued their connection to (and membership within) LGBTQ communities.

"Queer" as an empty signifier.—Paradoxically, another dominant theme that emerged among participants who self-identified as "queer" was the sentiment that "queer" can become so all-encompassing, as a catchall identity, that it may be in peril of becoming an empty social category. Gamson (1995) describes this tendency as the "queer dilemma." While the lack of boundedness associated with "queer," as an identity, can make it particularly appealing to those for whom other categories feel overly restrictive or inappropriate, for others this very unboundedness can feel quite confining:

I could say I'm queer but I also am not so sure I want to signal that identity either because I feel sometimes queerness is a little irresponsible because it's just so overused that it becomes sort of meaningless. I don't even know what people [are] trying to indicate to me when they say that. So I don't know if I feel comfortable saying it. . . . I think my sexual identity doesn't have a particular proclivity or erotic choice that has anything to do with a

pre-existing terminology. . . . So I feel like in my life I slide myself into the term that worked mostly to make other people understand me—not necessarily because I feel like it really is an adequate description of who I am. (Polly, 40 years, New York)

For Polly, therefore, “queer” serves as a social identity category in which she reluctantly places herself for the purposes of becoming socially intelligible to others rather than from a sense of its personal resonance. Polly’s narrative thus highlights the critical importance and paradox of social recognition with regard to queer identities. Polly adopts a label that makes her socially recognizable and interpretable to social others. This label, however, fails to fully encapsulate or accurately describe the specificity of her particular partner choices and desires.

Amber (19 years, Ontario) offered another example of the limitations of “queer” as an identity signifier: “‘Queer’ is such a vague term. If you say you’re queer then people will often just assume that, if you’re a girl, then you’re a lesbian. . . . But I date men so I don’t want to . . . be just kind of lost in the queer umbrella. If you’re going to look at me and want to know what box I go in, put me in the right one.” For Amber, then, “queer” is a category that renders her attractions to cis men invisible. Rather than being overly all-encompassing, she finds it overly restrictive and exclusionary in the context of her own attractions and desires. Both Polly and Amber articulate such as “queer.” Some of these struggles, once again, echo those of expressly bisexual-identified women who often report being (mis)recognized as heterosexual when partnered with men and as lesbian when partnered with a woman, rendering their bisexual self-identifications invisible (Burrill 2001; Wolkomir 2009; Tabatabai and Linders 2011).

Cis women and their trans partners must often work to (re)define their identities—as individuals and in relationship to one another—in ways that both challenge and extend existing linguistic and social categories. Furthermore, the rising visibility and media presence of partnerships between cis women and trans men, particularly via the medium of the Internet, contributes to the emergence of queer cultural communities through which language and support may be continuously developed, challenged, and shared (see Shapiro 2004). The Internet emergence of a new linguistic identity term, “queer-straight” (which two participants in this study used to describe their relationship with their trans partner), may be one way in which sociolinguistic innovation is developing out of existing frustrations over lack of specificity and meaning with “queer.”

In addition to negotiating language and identity-classificatory systems, study participants reported marked and sometimes painful discrepancies between how they see and understand themselves and how they are seen and understood (or not) by others in their social communities and contexts. Two themes that frequently emerged for cis women partners of trans men were actually flip sides of the same “(mis)recognition coin”—being (mis)recognized (or “passing”) as unremarkably straight in both queer and nonqueer social spaces and becoming invisibly queer (i.e., no longer being recognized as a rightful member of the queer community) within queer social spaces. Clearly, (mis)recognition—or being “seen” and “not seen”—by various communities is a powerful social process that critically informs, validates, and invalidates personal identities and group memberships. The following sections detail these flip sides of this same coin of social group (mis)recognition and membership processes as well as describe how the cis women in this study negotiated these processes.

Identity and Social Norm Resisting and Affiliating

“I don’t want to be a housewife!”—Participants often spoke explicitly about not wanting to fall into relational patterns with their partner that might be interpreted as normative. Some cis women voiced this intention directly to their trans partner—as in the case of Emma (22 years, Ontario), who spoke of a conversation during which she reportedly told him: “I am a feminist and I don’t want to be a housewife. . . . That’s not who I am and that’s not who you’re going to be in a relationship with.” Some cis women and their trans partners shared in the desire to reject and resist normativity. According to Sage (21 years, Ontario): “It sort of is a little disturbing to both of us—as individuals and together—to think that we might fall into sort of a heterosexuality, a heteronormative pattern. Being queer, interacting as queer, presenting as queer, and being queer in the world is something that’s really important to both of us.” In a similar vein, Belinda (24 years, Ontario) explained: “We both say that it’s a queer relationship. Neither of us are interested in passing as a straight couple or having people believe that we’re a straight couple.”

Recall that the majority of cis women’s accounts include discussion of being (mis)recognized as heterosexual by social others. As such, these cis women’s vocal and instrumental resistance to being socially (mis)recognized as anything but “queer” offers possibilities for destabilizing normativity insofar as it

challenges social others' notions of what a "heterosexual couple" is like. Further, it reveals the ways in which participants position themselves explicitly against habituated, iterative enactments of normativity—which they explicitly counterpose to feminist and queer identities. Of course, their resistance may be limited given that opportunities to correct the social (mis)recognition of others do not always readily present themselves, may be unsuccessful, may be resisted by one's partner, or may be unsafe in certain social contexts. . . .

Axial coding of the data revealed that cis women participants more often judged themselves to more strongly reject or resist normative practices and politics than their trans partners, particularly when they self-identified as "queer." This finding might be expected when we consider that being recognized by others as male is often socially accomplished through relational enactments of normative or hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987). In other words, trans men (like cis men) often gain social recognition of their gender identity as men when engaging in stereotypical social behaviors associated with "being a man" (see Connell 1987; Brown 2009; Pfeffer 2010; Ward 2010). While there was no difference in self-reports of enacting traditional versus nontraditional gender performances in relationships across age or sexual identity of participants, younger cis women (those under 35 years of age) more frequently worried that their relationships would be (mis)recognized as heterosexual than older cis women (those 35 years of age and older). These patterns likely reflect the influence of Third Wave feminist and queer politics in the lives of cis women under 35 years of age in this sample (see Pfeffer 2010).

"*We're just another straight couple with an extra set of tits!*"—Despite the fact that participants most frequently identified themselves (and their relationships) as "queer" and distanced themselves and their relationships from characterization as "heteronormative," a vocal minority made statements that could be interpreted as reflective of heteronormativity. These statements ranged from the seemingly blatant—such as that from Lily (26 years, Florida), which opens this section—to those couched in the feminist post-structuralist language of gender performativity (see Butler 1990, 1993). Axial coding of the data revealed that cis women ages 35 and older reported desires for heteronormativity more often than those younger than 35 years of age. Those cis women who reported that their trans partners were perceived socially as male "always" or "almost always" were most likely to

report performing traditional enactments of gender in their relationships and to report that their trans partner embraced normativity. Cis women were also more likely to report performing traditional enactments of gender in their relationships when their partners transitioned over the course of the relationship and were trans identified when the relationship began (as opposed to those whose relationship began as lesbian or those who were with partners who had already completed most of their transition by the time the relationship began).

When Ellia (24 years, New Mexico) was asked how she would describe the type of relationship that she has with her partner, she responded: "We're just a straight couple. He's my fiancé, we're getting married, we're just a straight couple." While Ellia's description is laden with unremarkable, normative descriptors (e.g., "straight," "he," "fiancé," "married," "straight," "couple"), her invocation of the phrase, "We're *just* [my emphasis] a straight couple," twice, may be interpreted as awareness that, without defending the normativity of her partnership, her relationship may be quite unlikely to be understood by others as "just a straight couple." Margaret (29 years, Massachusetts) offered another perspective on distancing her family from counternormativity: "One of the first conversations we ever had was about kids, how many we wanted, and what the time frame was and we aligned completely. . . . Sometimes, when you're *super* radical, you get to *not* be radical! And I want our kids to have one set of parents with one last name." Margaret's conceptualization is an interesting and provocative one—it suggests that privately held queer identities (which may be socially invisible or hidden, particularly in the context of family life) remain socially radical. Furthermore, it suggests that, based on this internally held queer identity, it is possible (and perhaps even acceptable) to access certain privileges and normative institutions that do not challenge or erode the "queerness" of these privately held queer identities. Margaret acknowledges and resists normative understandings of family as she casts herself in the part of "*super* radical" and relays the negotiations and deliberations in which she and her partner have engaged with regard to having and naming children. This vision of a possible future that Margaret envisions allows her to transform normative ("*not* radical") practices of having and naming children into a "*super* radical" enterprise of queer family building.

Cis women participants also articulated their experiences enacting what some may interpret as habituated and stereotypically gendered relational structures

in ways they explicitly linked to conscious gender performativity and normative resistance (Pfeffer 2012). According to Rachel (27 years, Ohio): “I think he had this fantasy . . . which I don’t think exists for anybody anymore. But, in his head, part of becoming a man was becoming a *Leave It to Beaver* dad—like coming home and mom has dinner on the table and whatever else is happening. But it turns out he cleans house more than I do and he cooks more than I do. So I think, at this point, our relationship is undefinable by present terms; so I would just say, ‘queer.’ It’s just different. It’s different than anything available.” Eliza (24 years, Nova Scotia) offered another example that paralleled Rachel’s but also explicitly considered the importance of others’ social perceptions of her relationship structure:

We’re both very sort of intrigued by 50s décor and roles and all that sort of stuff. . . . I will take on the role of housewife and, a lot of the time, it’s this tongue-in-cheek sort of thing. He’ll be like, “Get me a beer!” and I’ll put on an apron and run off into the other room, “Here ya go, dear!” It’s very sort of playful. Again, it’s the performance of gender instead of *really* taking it all that seriously. But, at the same time . . . the kitchen is *my* kitchen and all this sort of stuff that’s very gendered. . . . Sometimes I’m concerned that other people might not quite get it and that they might think that we’re really espousing these very traditional roles. . . . I don’t want to be the passive wife. . . . I’d much rather be the tough wife.

For these participants, performing normativity is a reportedly conscious dynamic that holds the potential to be simultaneously nostalgic, flexible, ironic, and difficult to define. Cis women and their trans men partners clearly engage in dynamic, relational processes that produce and validate enactments of gender in ways that may be simultaneously normative and counternormative, despite the commonly voiced concern to not be (mis)recognized as traditional or unremarkably heterosexual (for more on this, see Brown [2009]; Ward [2010]; Pfeffer [2010], [2012]).

A sociological queer analysis might also usefully trouble assertions that those in relationships with trans people must have relationships that are somehow more transgressive or counternormative than other types of relationships. As Kessler and McKenna (2003) note, the prefix “trans” in “transgender” does not necessarily refer to the “transcendence” or “transformation” of gender or gender normativity, and to assume that it does is to minimize decades of sociological work testifying to the rigidity and recalcitrance of the socially

structuring gender binary in our society. These assertions also fail to consider the ways in which identity choices are socially embedded, strategic, and constrained. From a queer sociological analytic perspective, we might approach questions about whether the relationships between cis women and trans men reflect a radical subversion of cultural normativity or merely mirror and repackage cultural normativity with some degree of critical suspicion. Such questions implicitly suggest that the onus of responsibility for radically reconfiguring gendered power relations ultimately lies with a numerical and marginalized social minority. Indeed, we might usefully redirect such questions toward whether or not relationships between cis women and cis men—the numerical majority in our culture—currently reflect radical subversion of cultural normativity. Doing so reminds us of the powerful structuring forces of inequality for all social actors and also points to potentially fruitful alliances between social actors working toward equality aims. Building these communities of political and social alliance and resistance was described as an area of particular struggle for the cis women in this study.

Community Belonging, Vanishing, and Outcasting

“*A normal, boring couple*” and “*I definitely don’t miss being scared.*”—Brown (2009) describes “sexual identity renegotiation” as a central challenge faced by cis women partners of trans men. When providing accounts of their experiences in social spaces, cis women sometimes discussed how being (mis)recognized as unremarkably heterosexual was a social phenomenon highly desired by one’s trans partner, while their own feelings remained more ambivalent or even conflicted. As Frieda (28 years, Ontario) discussed:

[My partner] definitely was into the whole idea of us passing as a straight couple, so nothing queer really fit into our everyday lives or relationship because his main priority was passing as a man and that I should look like a woman so we can pass as a straight couple and he can blend in. So he encouraged me to look more feminine and to have my hair long and things like that . . . [but] I wanted to shave my head and . . . pierce things and . . . do things that normal, boring, feminine, straight women didn’t usually do and they didn’t fit in with what he wanted. . . . I kind of felt guilty or selfish if I tried to dress the way that I wanted. . . . When we were going out together, I tried to look as feminine and as boring as I could so we could pass as a normal, boring couple.

Frieda's narrative speaks to the way in which her partner's accomplishment of recognition as a man depends, at least in part, on social others' recognition of her as normatively feminine. This makes sense if we consider that the accomplishment of social recognition as a "normal" man depends, centrally, upon being perceived by others as not a woman and not gay (Connell 1987). In other words, social recognition of Frieda's partner as a man is facilitated through social assumptions linking manhood and heteronormativity. This assumed connection to heteronormativity was both troubling and strange to many participants—particularly those for whom social recognition as lesbian and counternormative had become a critical aspect of their sense of self.

Polly (40 years, New York) discussed challenges connected to reinterpreting her own identity, the social perceptions of others, and social group memberships:

I think I'm still trying to sort out what it means *not* to be a lesbian. There is a nice *recognition* [author's emphasis] when you're walking down the street with your girlfriend and you're holding hands and see another lesbian and they see you as a lesbian and it's like you feel like you're all in the same club. So I miss that. . . . I just sort of feel like this level of boringness. I guess I have to say I definitely got off on the transgression of having men look at me and then kissing my girlfriend. And now it's like I have men look at me and then I kiss him and it's like, "Big whoop." . . . It's just not the same charge. So I think I miss that. I miss some of that transgressive sort of fucking with people's heteronormative assumptions and now I'm just like basically following the script and it feels a little weird. It's not quite as fun. [I miss] the performativity of being gay. . . . Sometimes it's scary and you don't do it. So I definitely don't miss being scared.

For both Frieda and Polly, social experiences wherein they believed their partner was recognized by others as a man elided their own queer visibility, creating the paradoxical situation of gaining access to heteronormative social privilege while simultaneously losing access to (or recognition by) sexual minority communities with which they strongly identify/identified. Furthermore, both describe "passing" or being (mis)recognized as heterosexual as "boring," highlighting the power of visibly queer social identities to provoke and dynamically elicit sexually charged, emotional responses based upon their connection to transgressiveness. Polly's concluding remark, alluding to the danger associated with public expressions of intimacy that are recognized as lesbian, highlights a pragmatic aspect of being (mis)recognized as heterosexual: reduced threat of physical and sexual violence directed toward those who are more visibly queer.

Most cis women who reported being (mis)recognized as part of a heterosexual couple, by family, friends, or strangers, acknowledged the privilege that such (mis)recognition entails, while simultaneously expressing discomfort with this privilege and bemoaning the inevitable trade-off of losing social recognition as queer. Margaret (29 years, Massachusetts) stated: "I have mixed feelings about it. Sometimes I really like passing. There's a real social benefit to it; it makes it a lot easier." Veronica (21 years, New York) told me: "It makes me feel safe in the world," but she also commented on the flip side: "It makes me feel really invisible and that's something he and I both deal with a lot. We don't like the invisibility factor. We're always looking for ways to be visible and to educate others. So maybe that's the only way because I don't really know how much we can walk down the street wearing shirts that say, 'We're not so straight!'" When Maya (30 years, California), who had just had a baby, was asked to discuss how she felt she and her partner are perceived by others, she responded: "It's annoying because we get such privilege everywhere we go. . . . My mother's like, 'Thank God!' And I provided her a grandchild, so I'm 'normal.' In some respects it's good and in other respects I wish *everyone* had that." Eliza (25 years, Nova Scotia), who is legally married to her trans partner, stated: "With family . . . there's a thing in the back of my head that wonders if it's so easy for them because now we're a 'straight couple.' It's almost less explaining for them to do in the future. Sometimes it's a mixed blessing." As Eliza reveals, family members' potential investments in processes of doing sexuality for their relatives further highlight sexuality as an interactive social accomplishment. These narratives also reveal a keenly developed consciousness of the way queer people experience the sometimes-marginalizing gaze of nonqueer people, poignantly highlighting the disjunctive between self-identification and social (mis)recognition.

"Another breeder couple invading."—Participants in this study also described the experience of losing access to (and social recognition within) queer communities as they became "invisibly queer."¹⁰ Margaret (29 years, Massachusetts) said: "When I see lesbian couples with a baby, I smile at them and have this moment of like, 'What a cute couple with a baby.' And [my partner] and I have this experience together because, at one point, he had been externally identified by others as a lesbian. So we have this moment of, 'Oh, another queer couple with a baby!' But [lesbian couples] . . . don't see that we're having this moment of camaraderie like, 'Yay, you did it, we're going to do it!' They see us as like, 'Oh, those straight people are looking at us.'" Maya (30 years, California) offered a

similar story: “We can go anywhere and not have people looking at us except when we’re in [a gay neighborhood] and then it’s like, ‘Oh, another breeder couple invading.’ And I just want to wear rainbow flags everywhere I go so I can prove that I belong in this community.” Lilia (22 years, California) also articulated the not-uncommon experience of having her queer identity elided by others within the queer community: “My lesbian friends . . . [are] like, basically, ‘Oh, so you turned straight.’ . . . [But] I don’t consider this a straight relationship since he’s very queer. . . . I can see how it’s straight in some context. But it’s queer. His experiences of growing up as a woman [are] what makes it queer.” In each of these narratives, participants describe experiencing the elision of their queerness—disappearing into the background of queer communities within which they often previously found community and recognition as queer. Many cis women participants described being (mis)recognized as heterosexual as not only personally invalidating but as alienating from queer communities of social support and belonging. Once again, these experiences echo those of bisexual-identified women who often report being ostracized from lesbian communities when partnered with men and from heterosexual communities when partnered with women (Burrill 2001; Wolkomir 2009; Tabatabai and Linders 2011).

Cis women partners of trans men face challenges of marginalization not only from social distancing, exclusion, and (mis)recognition by others within LGBTQ communities, but sometimes as a result of their trans partner’s wish to disassociate from these communities to reinforce their own social recognition as a man. Belinda (24 years, Ontario) spoke about losing her connection to the lesbian community when her partner disengaged from it:

It was tough for me as someone who had just kind of come out as a lesbian, I remember wanting to do lesbian things and go to lesbian bars and that kind of stuff. And I remember a switch in him where he was like, “No, I’m a straight guy.” And I think that was hard because there was this community that I was trying to get involved with that suddenly didn’t work with his identity. . . . I didn’t really know that there was the option of him saying, “I’m queer.” I just figured that’s what happened when someone became trans—you were a lesbian and now you’re straight.

Belinda articulates the limited (and often limiting) nature of social models of identity in the context of transition. Belinda was unaware that there were other ways (than “straight male”) for trans men in relationships with cis women to identify and that these different identifications (if embraced by her partner) might

generate alternate possibilities for her own identity and membership to social communities. Narratives like Belinda’s also highlight how the accomplishment of social recognition as a man often necessitates social distancing from LGBTQ communities and spaces.

“The people that I dated would make me visibly queer.”—When considering the personal and social identities and group memberships of cis women partners of trans men, it is also important to consider the often temporal-relational and contingent aspects of these ways of being and belonging in the world. Susan (23 years, Tennessee) articulated two distinct dilemmas she faced as a formerly lesbian-identified cis woman and as the former partner of a trans man: “I lost my community. . . . You lose the lesbian community and you really don’t get anything else. . . . And the partners’ [of trans men] community—you’re only a valid member of that as long as you’re in your relationship, which has nothing to do with *you* and everything to do with *him*.” For Susan, carving out a space in the queer community along with other partners of trans men reflected both a contingent and tenuous subject position within such communities. Susan’s experiences of being pushed out of lesbian community spaces upon partnering with a trans man was not uncommon. Rather than operating along explicit cut-and-dried practices of inclusion and exclusion, many cis women described more subtle social practices in which their rightful membership within lesbian community spaces was challenged or brought into question once they began relationships with trans men or once a previously lesbian-identified partner began to move away from that identity and transitioned to living as a trans man.

Ani (21 years, Ohio) discussed another challenge in her relationship with a partner who socially identified as a “man” rather than as a “transgender man”: “It’s a lot easier to be able to [say]: ‘Yes, I’m queer, I’m dating a *trans man*,’ as opposed to, ‘Yes, I’m queer, I’m dating a man.’ People won’t ask you to justify yourself in the same way. . . . Your sexuality clearly relies on your partner.” Ani’s partner’s gender identity and recognition by social others as a man meant that her own queer identity was frequently made invisible—rendering her unremarkably heterosexual in the eyes of social others, including queer social others.

Nearly 30% of the participant sample self-identified, unprompted, as “femme”—meaning that the actual composition of femme-identifying or feminine-appearing cis women in the sample is likely higher than 30%. Nyamora (2004) and Brown (2009) both describe the ways in which cis femme-identified women partners of trans men frequently experience a grieving process in connection to the perceived loss of

their queer femme visibility. Further, many of the participants in my study discussed how others' recognition of their queerness often relies upon their connection to a partner who embodies female masculinity in a visible and culturally intelligible way. For example, Teresa (24 years, Maine) told me:

I think as a femme. . . . I don't feel like I've ever been seen as queer when I've been by myself. I think so often in my history of dating people that the people that I dated would make me visibly queer. So it's really interesting when the person I'm dating makes me *invisible*. And so I don't gain any visibility as a lesbian or as someone who is queer when being out in public with [my trans partner] the way I would with past partners. So that's really, really hard. However, in a way it sort of feels almost liberating because now I and only I am responsible for my queer visibility. . . . I think that it's sexism, honestly, that femmes are seen as invisible beings when really we're radically queer in our own right and we're just never given that credit.

As Teresa articulates, femme-appearing/identifying cis women partnered with trans men, therefore, may face particular barriers with regard to being recognized as a member of the communities to which they belong and with which they identify (see also Nyamora 2004; Brown 2009; Joslin-Roher and Wheeler 2009; Ward 2010).¹¹

These narratives reveal the extent to which queer visibility remains culturally synonymous with social perceptions of female masculinity and male femininity (Hutson 2010), often rendering those who embody cis femininity within queer communities invisible as queer. These narratives also echo earlier writings on lesbian butch and femme genders as socially intelligible identities around which communities materialized and organized (cf., Ponse 1978; Krieger 1983; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Kennedy and Davis 1993). Queer invisibility was of particular concern and consideration to many of the femme-identified cis women I interviewed. This articulated invisibility serves as a marked empirical contrast to theorizing around femme identity (e.g., Hollibaugh 1997; Munt 1998; Levitt, Gerrish, and Hiestand 2003), which marks it as politically transgressive (and even "transgender") in its own right. Such fissures between personal experience and political potential further highlight the need to examine the processes by which gender and sexual identities are produced through social interaction.

"*You're not really gay*" and "*Take your pants off and show me.*"—Participants spoke about the ways in which queer femininities may not only be rendered

invisible within queer and nonqueer cultural spaces, but how they may also be explicitly devalued within some queer communities relative to queer androgynies and queer masculinities (Kennedy and Davis 1993; Cogan 1999; Levitt et al. 2003). As Belinda (24 years, Ontario) told me:

Basically within the lesbian community I was like completely made fun of. I used to have people make fun of me for carrying a purse and looking "too girly" and, "Oh you're not really gay." Just those kinds of comments. So that was really hard for me when I was coming out because I just wanted to be taken seriously you know. . . . So my response to that [when I first came out] was to kind of change to become *less* feminine, change my body posturing and the way that I dress and cut off all my hair and that kind of stuff.

Narratives like Belinda's exemplified some queer cis women's experience of living in the liminal space of insider/outsider with regard to both queer and non-queer communities.

Ward (2010) suggests that sidelining of the power and transgressive potential of femme identity among cis women partners of trans men may be an artifact of their primary social status within trans communities as allies and supporters of their partners—one of the forms of "gender labor" in which they engage. Some of the strategies self-identified femme participants described for rendering their queer identities more recognizable included adopting unique and unconventional hairstyles and hair colors, wearing rainbow jewelry and other LGBTQ pride symbols, dressing in vintage clothing, and obtaining visible tattoos and piercings, embodying counternormative embodiment practices with the intention of visually signifying their queer identities (see also Pitts 2000). Participants' narratives revealed the impact of being rendered invisible or an outsider not only in terms of one's own queer identity and relationship but also in determining the parameters of in-group/out-group social membership itself.

While some trans men and their cis women partners described being (mis)recognized as heterosexual and becoming invisible as queer within LGBTQ communities, other participants reported that their partners were (mis)recognized as trans men or as cis women, rather than cis men, more often in gay and lesbian social spaces than in mainstream or non-LGBTQ social spaces. The tensions between these (mis)recognition processes carried striking social consequences. One set of trends that emerged in participants' accounts involved (1) explicit exclusion of trans people and

their partners from primarily gay and lesbian social spaces and (2) intimidating and even violent interactions aimed toward “finding out” the “real” sex of those who are trans as they interact within primarily gay and lesbian social spaces. Seventeen (34%) participants described instances of being told by leaders of gay and lesbian organizations (or hearing through the grapevine) that their or their partner’s presence was no longer welcome since their partner’s transition. Martha (25 years, Massachusetts) described making reservations at a lesbian bed and breakfast only to be told that she and her partner were no longer welcome upon the innkeeper’s learning of her partner’s transition. Lynne (35 years, California) described the exclusion of trans men from the yearly “dyke march” in her town.

June (21 years, Ontario), Kendra (21 years, Ohio), and Samantha (20 years, Michigan) each relayed harrowing and eerily similar experiences their trans partner had in gay and lesbian bars. According to June: “He went out to a . . . lesbian bar . . . and they wanted him to prove that he was actually male. So there was a lot of, ‘Take your pants off and show me,’ type of thing. They followed him into the bathroom and it was about an hour of harassment like that.” Samantha told me: “He was going to the bathroom . . . and he was waiting for the stalls and . . . this old lesbian got up in [his] face and was like, ‘Go use the other bathroom, we need this one more than you do. . . .’ And she got really up in his face about it and he was like, ‘I’m trans. I have to sit to pee.’ And she was like, ‘No you’re not. . . .’ She actually ripped his shirt off to see.” In the context of a gay bar, Kendra relayed the following description:

He almost got beat up that night . . . He went to the women’s restroom because he wasn’t fully male and he didn’t want gay guys to find out that he didn’t have a penis; so he chose to use the women’s restroom that night. He was still fairly early into his transition and a guy followed him in there and watched him urinate and said, ‘Take off that binder. I don’t know why you want to be a guy. . . .’ Later, the guy lunged across the dance floor at my partner and, luckily, one of our friends pushed him out of the way.

In each of these instances, trans men were held accountable for others’ recognition of them as men—social processes that could have frightening and even dangerous consequences, even within communities that had formerly served as relatively safe havens from exclusion and discrimination.¹²

These narratives attest to the permeability and instability of membership and recognition within various identity-based communities. In a social context that continues to affirm fixed and naturalized binaries (male/female, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual) despite increasing evidence documenting the fluidity and diversity of sex, gender, and sexual identifications, we find herein evidence for these identities as interactive social accomplishments. Perhaps even more important, we are urged to reconsider just who should be held accountable when it comes to recognizing the sex, gender, and sexual identities of others.

Conclusion: Possibilities for Social Solidarity and Broader Application

In this study, I draw from Connell’s (2009) notion of “recognition” to demonstrate the myriad ways in which we “do” not only gender, but sexuality as well, revealing sexual identities as interactional social accomplishments through which status, rights, and group membership may be stripped or conveyed. By challenging the essentialist notion that sexual identities are largely fixed and natural/biological, we are better poised to consider what is at stake when social actors recognize and misrecognize their peers’ sexual self-identifications. The cis women I interviewed often vocally asserted their self-identification as queer. Yet in many instances, these cis women’s accounts focused on being (mis)recognized by both queer and nonqueer social others as unremarkably heterosexual. Which of these accounts of their sexual identity is “true”? These findings prompt consideration of how the social effects of (mis)recognition processes (e.g., being able to access regulated social institutions and social membership within particular groups) are powerfully structuring—perhaps even largely determinant—of social group membership.

. . . Extending Connell’s (2009) “recognition” framework, this study highlights what is at stake in social (mis)recognition processes not only for queer social actors but also for everyone, as these processes reveal the ways in which access to regulated social groups and institutions is often mediated largely through interactional and perceptual social processes rather than static or essential aspects of individuals.

Namaste, writing about queerness and queer theory, states: “We cannot assert ourselves to be outside of heterosexuality, nor entirely inside, because each of these terms achieves its meaning in relation to the other. . . . We can think about the *how* of these boundaries . . . how they are created, regulated and

contested” (1994, p. 224). This analysis offers further insight into that *how*—detailing the ways in which heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and queer identities and social identity group memberships overlap and are messily embraced, resisted, and (mis)recognized in the context of cis women’s relationships with trans men. How might we make sense of the following narrative from a cis woman partner of a trans man that inspired the title for this article and was emblematic of many of the responses that I received? “I don’t like passing as a straight woman. I would feel like I wasn’t visible at times—and same with him, that he wasn’t visible. . . . Both of our identities were very blurred; and that’s a tough thing when so much of who we are is about other people perceiving us. . . . I like my queer identity and that’s what I want people to see. So it was tough when I knew that wasn’t being seen” (Martha, 25 years, Massachusetts). Much of the thrust of the mainstream lesbian and gay social movement over the past two decades has focused on protesting and bringing greater public awareness to discrimination against lesbians and gay men as well as their exclusion from various social institutions and privileges, such as legally recognized marriage.¹³

In calling for expanded rights and inclusion, mainstream lesbian and gay social movements have largely centered upon crafting a politics of sameness and respectability that stands in stark contrast to the oppositional politics of activist groups of the late 1960s through the early 1990s—such as the Gay Liberation Front, ACT UP, and Queer Nation (Duggan 2002; Ward 2008). Further, many of these more recent efforts depend largely upon appeals to the biological/genetic etiology of sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g., Lady Gaga’s aforementioned pop culture anthem, “Born This Way”). Couching demands for inclusion, equality, and freedom from discrimination within a framework of biological determinism consistently compels the following presumably rhetorical defense of these demands when they face social opposition: “In the context of historical and contemporary social discrimination and exclusion, why would anyone *choose* this?” Yet narratives and self-identifications like Martha’s provide evidence against the counterfactual claim that no one would choose queerness if given such an option, just as they simultaneously recognize and explicitly value queer identities and queer cultures per se. They also reframe the issue of “choice” to consider that choosing to self-identify as queer is not synonymous with choosing social (mis)recognition, exclusion, and discrimination. In other words, many of the women I interviewed refused to be held accountable for other people’s

(mis)recognition of their or their partner’s sex, gender, and sexual identities. . . .

Choosing queer self-identification and alliance as a form of normative resistance (see Pfeffer 2012) is not limited by the contours of one’s own body in relation to those of one’s partner(s). Normative social structures inscribe the parameters within which all social actors must live their daily lives. As such, all social actors desiring social change (perhaps especially those with normative privilege) are accountable for, and have a vested interest in, resisting and pushing against these parameters, as well as supporting others engaged in similar or parallel forms of resistance. Reframing and reorienting sociological analyses to the normative center, therefore, highlights the accountability and responsibility that those with relative privilege hold with regard to enacting social change, resisting stultifying normativity, and reconfiguring relationships of power. In doing so, we might further shift our inquiries to consider how and why anyone might develop and nurture their own and others’ queer identities and relationships for the purposes of greater gender and sexual equality. . . .

NOTES

1. As Schilt and Westbrook, drawing from Serano (2007), note, “Cis is the Latin prefix for ‘on the same side.’ It complements trans, the prefix for ‘across’ or ‘over’ . . . to refer to individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity” (Schilt and Westbrook 2009, p. 461). Use of the phrase “cis women” throughout this manuscript is intended to mark the identities of women in my sample, just as the identities of men who are their partners are also marked. To not do so, as rightfully noted by an *AJS* reviewer, “reproduces the ‘otherness’ of trans by not marking the unmarked category.”

2. The phrase “trans men” is used throughout for sake of consistency and simplicity. It should be noted, however, that gender identity labels and categories are often far from consistent or simple. The cis women in this sample identified their trans partners using various terms—transgender, transsexual, trans, female-to-male (ftm), man, boi, etc. The “trans men” referred to in this study are individuals who were assigned, by sex, as “female” at birth and whose gender identity does not directly correspond with this sex assignment or their sex categorization. Some trans men partners of the cis women I interviewed have pursued hormonal or surgical realignment surgeries to bring their bodies in closer alignment with their gender identities, while others have not. . . . For additional background information on the language, concepts, and terms related to transgender identity and

experience, please see Wentling et al. (2008) and Pfeffer (2010).

3. Epstein (1994) offers the provocative claim that much queer theory is rooted in and dependent upon sociological theoretical precedents, particularly across the areas of symbolic interactionism and labeling theory. These critiques are later echoed by Dunn (1977) and Green (2007), who highlight the particular theoretical and empirical contributions of pragmatists, symbolic interactionists, and ethnomethodologists to the development of poststructuralist and queer theory produced by scholars such as Judith Butler. As Green (2007, pp. 26–27) writes: “With regard to gender and sexuality . . . sociology has been doing a kind of queer theory long before the first queer theorist set pen to paper.”

4. As Sedgwick writes (1990, p. 1) in a foundational text of queer, *Epistemology of the Closet*: “An understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition.”

5. Judith Butler’s (1990) theorization of “gender performativity” draws from Foucault’s ([1976] 1990) theorizing around power, repression, and generativity. According to Butler (1990), being a “man” or a “woman” (or “male” or “female”) is not a fixed, biological, or immutable human characteristic but, rather, is (re)produced through a system of power and social relations. While these operations of power may compel social relations that (re)produce the normative as ideal, and discipline deviations from normative ideals, these same repressive forces ultimately suggest and generate the potential for disobedience and alternate social relations—producing “gender trouble.”

6. “Sex assignment” refers to the assignment of a person, at birth, to “male” or “female” based on bodily signifiers such as presence of a penis or vagina. “Sex categorization” refers to the everyday, iterative placement of a person into social categories such as “girl,” “women,” “boy,” “man.”

7. Some participants, who had been with the same partner prior to this transition, found this form of social exchange particularly salient as they noticed very different reactions from older persons when engaging in public hand-holding with the very same partner. Prior to transition, when their partner was reportedly “read” as female and the couple was “read” as lesbian, they recalled older individuals starting at them while not smiling, whispering, avoiding eye contact, and not returning smiles.

8. Participants themselves used the term “roles” (e.g., “1950s housewife role”) to describe the enactments of traditional wife/husband, and mother/father family dynamics as they understood them.

9. See also Pfeffer (2012) for further discussion of the overlaps between this sample and those focusing on bisexual-identified cis women.

10. See Brown (2009) for a discussion of similar experiences among another sample of cis women partners of trans men.

11. It must also be noted that the gender presentation of trans men is of critical importance here in others’ constructions

of the couple’s sexual identity. Women who told me that their trans partner was often perceived as a gay man by social others were often misrecognized as “friends” rather than romantic partners. Some women described instances of their partner being hit on by other men in their presence.

12. Of course it is important to consider that lesbian and gay communities, while often providing shelter from homophobia and heterosexism, still struggle with issues of inclusion and discrimination not only with regard to those who are trans or bisexual but with regard to racism, classism, ableism, and sizeism (to name just a few areas) as well.

13. For an overview of the public response to these efforts, see Stone (2012).

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Introduction to Reading 5

Raewyn Connell's contributions to the sociological understanding of masculinities and gender relations generated major changes in gender theory, research, and policy-making. Connell, as discussed in the Introduction to the book and the Introduction to this chapter, has argued that masculinities are multiple, that masculinities change over time, and that women as well as men have a role in creating masculinities. One of the most powerful concepts to emerge from Connell's work is "hegemonic masculinity," a culturally exalted form of masculinity which tops a hierarchy of masculinities and is a key mechanism in maintaining gender inequality. In this reading, Connell turns her attention to the importance of decolonizing the study of masculinities and, consequently, unsettling dominant views of gender relations produced in Western Europe and North America. As Connell says, gender discourse has been Eurocentric and thus the assumptions underlying much research on gender relations and policy-making are biased. For example, Connell notes in the reading that "Anglophone categories such as 'MSM,' 'identity,' 'heterosexuality,' and even 'men' may misrepresent" the realities of people's lives in the periphery. Connell calls for a critique of the relation between hegemony and masculinity and an historical understanding of masculinities in relationship to structures of imperialism and neoliberal global power structures. As she states at the close of the reading, we need accurate knowledge and insight into hegemonic masculinity that incorporates Southern perspectives on gender relations and power.

1. What is the global South, and why does Connell argue for including Southern research on masculinities?
2. How and why did colonial powers, such as the Christian societies of Europe, employ gendered violence in their strategies for hegemony?

3. What is transnational corporate masculinity?
4. Describe some of the counter-hegemonic projects among men that have emerged alongside the new world gender order.

MASCULINITIES IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

HEGEMONY, CONTESTATION, AND CHANGING STRUCTURES OF POWER

Raewyn Connell

Thirty years ago, three Australian authors proposed “a new sociology of masculinity” (Carrigan et al. 1985). They criticized the popular concept of a “male sex role,” offering instead a combination of feminist, gay liberation, and psychoanalytic ideas. Their most influential idea was that multiple masculinities existed, that there was hierarchy among them, and that a hegemonic version, at the top of the hierarchy, connected the subordination of women to the subordination of marginalized groups of men. The term “hegemonic masculinity” named a key mechanism sustaining an oppressive society and implied that contesting this mechanism was an important strategy of change.

In the following decades, as research grew alongside public debates about men and masculinity, the concept of hegemonic masculinity was widely used. The concept has played a role in reform agendas and has guided empirical investigations. It has also been vigorously criticized and re-formulated (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Questions have been raised about the idea of masculinity, the use of Gramscian ideas in understanding gender relations, the location of the concept in modern or postmodern thought, and the relation of hegemonic masculinity to identity, power, and violence (Howson 2006; Meuser 2010; Zhan 2015; Pascoe and Tristan 2016).

Most of this research and debate has occurred within the global North. It is increasingly recognized that the resulting geopolitics of knowledge is a problem. For a deeper understanding of the issues raised in the debates about hegemonic masculinity, we need to learn not only from Western Europe and North America but also from the majority world. We need, in short, to decolonize the study of masculinities.

DECOLONIZING THE DISCUSSION

Modern knowledge production has a global structure (Hountondji 1997). A worldwide division of labor, with its origins in colonial conquest, locates the production of theory in the global metropole and treats the periphery essentially as a data source. Intellectual workers in the periphery normally follow the intellectual authority of the North and seek recognition there. (Our 1985 article “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity” was a good example of this pattern.) Over the last two decades, however, there has been a sustained critique of Northern dominance in the social sciences, proposing globally inclusive agendas of theory (Connell 2007; Go 2012; Bhambra 2014; Rosa 2014). The same kind of discussion has developed in gender studies (Bulbeck 1998; Lugones 2007; Connell 2015).

These concerns have recently emerged in research on masculinity. Robert Morrell and Sandra Swart in South Africa (2005) pose the situation of the poorest part of the world’s population as a key issue for masculinity studies. Margaret Jolly (2008, p. 1), introducing research on masculinities in the post-colonial Pacific, emphasises “the crucial importance of colonialism in the construction of indigenous masculinities in both past and present.” Paul Amar (2011), in a critical review of Middle East masculinity studies, vigorously argues for a decolonial perspective. Ford and Lyons (2012), introducing research on masculinities from Southeast Asia, question universalized concepts and emphasize the need for local knowledge.

Kopano Ratele (2013), on the basis of experience in southern Africa, questions the assumption that “traditional” masculinity automatically means patriarchal dominance. The Brazilian scholar Diego Santos Vieira de Jesus (2011) shows how a post-colonial approach to

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masculinities yields a broad historical framework that throws light on the colonizers and the imperial center as well as the colonized. In a recent article I pointed to the global archive on masculinities and argued for the importance of ideas, as well as data, from the global South (Connell 2014).

The idea of hegemonic masculinity has to be considered in the light of these changes; and the question arises whether the idea of hegemony applies in the colonial world at all. The Indian historian Ranajit Guha, founder of Subaltern Studies, questioned this in an article called “Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography” (1989). The imperial power, he argued, never achieved hegemony in colonial India. The British persuaded themselves that they operated by the rule of law; but this was self-deception, in a colony actually controlled by autocratic decrees and military force. The truth was revealed by the widespread acts of resistance that British rule continually encountered.

The problem with the Eurocentrism of global gender discourse is that it projects into gender analysis everywhere the image that the society of the global North holds of itself. Specifically, it presumes coherence and a self-sustaining logic for any gender order. This is implicit in the concepts of “patriarchy,” “sex/gender system,” “gender norms,” “gender regime,” and “heteronormativity.” Eurocentric gender research and policy-making assume that gender has a system-like character, a logical homogeneity and, though it may change, that it does so with continuity in time.

With these assumptions in the background, the concept of hegemony tends to become ahistorical, concerned with the social reproduction of a system. Hence the prevalence, in research on hegemonic masculinity, of ideas of identity formation, socialization, habitus, and the internalization of social norms—which are actually black-box concepts produced by assuming a mechanism of social reproduction (Connell 1983). Hence the familiar slippage between notions of hegemony and notions of domination (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), which are easily blurred when the reproduction of a hierarchical system is assumed.

Research in postcolonial contexts, however, calls exactly these assumptions into question. Historical discontinuity is the core of colonial conquest. Margrethe Silberschmidt (2004), researching HIV transmission in East Africa, rejects the idea that men’s dangerous assertion of sexual privilege reflected the continuity of “traditional” masculinity. She argues that gender violence resulted from the breakdown of traditional gender orders, under the pressures of colonialism and post-colonial economic change.

In a similar vein, when talking about feminist sexuality research in Africa, Jane Bennett (2008, p. 7)

observes that mainstream methods textbooks tacitly assume a stable social environment. But a stable environment cannot be assumed for research in postcolonial conditions where “relative chaos, gross economic disparities, displacement, uncertainty and surprise” are the norm not the exception. Discussing the “water wars” in Cochabamba (Bolivia), Nina Laurie (2005) traces the clash of masculinities in this defeated neoliberal privatization attempt. She too makes a strong argument that research in the global South cannot presume a consolidated gender order.

To discard global-North assumptions about social reproduction does not imply that gender concepts such as hegemonic masculinity must be abandoned. Rather, it requires that gender concepts should always be understood historically, as concepts that concern the making and transformation of gender orders through time. Hegemony is a historical possibility, a state of gender relations being struggled for, and struggled against, by different social forces. Since the accomplishment of hegemony is never guaranteed, the most useful way to conceptualize hegemonic masculinity is to treat it as a collective project for realizing gender hierarchy. And that, in the light of the postcolonial critique outlined above, is a process we now have to understand on a world scale.

HEGEMONY AND EMPIRE IN THE HISTORY OF MASCULINITIES

Constitutive Violence and the Making of Colonial Societies

Colonialism, as Guha said, involved massive violence. Some conquests destroyed a pre-colonial regime and so established rule over a subject population. The classic case was the invasion led by Cortés in México, smashing the Aztec empire and reducing indigenous men and women to a new kind of serfdom. In other cases, from Hispaniola to Australia, colonizing violence swept over a whole population and directly or indirectly destroyed most of it.

In a powerful argument Amina Mama (1997, p. 48) shows that to understand violence against women in postcolonial Africa we must understand the violence of colonialism; and to understand that, we must start with “gender relations and gender violence at the imperial source.” The Christian societies of Europe that launched the global conquests of the last five-hundred years were already patriarchal and organized for war. Until the machine gun and the aeroplane appeared, the only overwhelming weapon they had was the broadside-firing warship. It was their military organization and ruthlessness that enabled conquest on land.

This social technology involved constructions of masculinity. The masculinities of empire were necessarily bound up with the enabling of violence—violence sufficient to overcome the considerable military capabilities of colonized societies. When the colonizers sorted men into categories of “manly” and “effeminate,” as they often did (Sinha 1995), it was groups perceived as warriors—Sikh, Pathan, Zulu, Cheyenne—who were admired, though not trusted.

In Northern research on “gender-based violence,” violence is usually understood as a consequence of gender arrangements, i.e., as a dependent variable. In postcolonial analyses like Mama’s, violence is constitutive for gender relations. In an essay in the journal *Feminist Africa*, Jane Bennett (2010, p. 35) considers homophobic violence. She muses that, seen in the light of Southern experience, the connection between gender and violence changes shape: “gender, as practiced conventionally despite diversity of contexts, is violence.”

The double movement of disrupting indigenous gender orders and creating new ones was a fundamental and persisting feature of colonialism. Memory of the disruption is the driving force in one of the most famous postcolonial documents, Chinua Achebe’s (1958) great novel about masculinity in West Africa at the time of conquest, *Things Fall Apart*.

The dis-ordering of gender relations occurred in multiple ways, including rape, which was endemic in conquest and disrupted indigenous kinship and communal relations with the land; forced migrations, up to the huge scale of the Atlantic slave trade; the loss of women’s land rights, a feature of colonialism in the Pacific (Stauffer 2004); and the suppression of gender groupings such as the two-souled people of indigenous North America (Williams 1986). Imperial expansion also disrupted gender relations among the colonizers. The early history of the British settlements in Australia is full of debate about sexual anarchy and gender imbalance (Reid 2007). In the 1840s and 1850s there was a celebrated attempt to import a supply of women from England—a distance of twenty-thousand kilometres—to become respectable servants and wives (Kiddle 1992).

The making of colonial societies deeply concerned gender. It required the management of reproductive bodies through relationships that organized sexuality, birth and childrearing, domestic work, and the broad division of labor. Colonial economies required continuing workforces, and colonizing elites required family and inheritance structures.

In trying to stabilize the turbulent situations created by colonizing violence and the resistance of the colonized, the colonizing power brought into play mechanisms that can be seen as the initial hegemonic

projects of colonialism. Establishing hegemony was a principal task of missionary religion, as Valentine Mudimbe (1994, p. 140) notes in his powerful analysis of Belgian colonization in the Congo. All over the colonized world, missionary religion concerned itself with imposing a new order on gender relations and especially sexuality.

Hegemony is a matter of institutions as well as beliefs. Where schools were introduced by colonial governments or churches, they were typically gender-segregated. Systems of law regulated indigenous marriage, women’s rights, and inheritance. Gender relations were a significant concern in colonial legal codes such as those written by the French for Cambodia (Haque 2012). Colonized men were recruited in considerable numbers into imperial armed forces, especially the British and French. Patriarchal households organized labor forces and allowed white men sexual access to slave and indigenous women (Saffioti 1969).

A spectrum of hegemonic mechanisms also developed among the colonizers. They were sketched in J. O. C. Phillips’s (1987) pioneering study of settler-colonial masculinities in New Zealand, and can be seen very clearly in Robert Morrell’s (2001) classic study of colonial Natal. Morrell traces the institutionalization of a hegemonic form of masculinity in the schools, military forces, and civil society of the British settlers. It was specifically a harsh and insistent masculinity adapted to the need to dominate a colonized population.

Nothing guaranteed that colonial strategies for hegemony would succeed. Indeed, the project was inherently contradictory. The dynamics of colonialism both created the need and continually disrupted the results achieved. Colonialism disrupted gender order by continuing violence and dispossession; by the turbulence of the global capitalist economy; by continuing resistance, from Tupac Amaru to Abd el-Krim. There is every reason to think gender hegemony in colonial contexts was patchy, contested, and varied greatly from one part of the colonial world to another.

Out of Colonialism: Hegemonic Projects in Resistance and Development

Raymond Suttner (2005), in an illuminating study of the armed struggle against apartheid in South Africa, notes that colonial and apartheid authorities typically denied the manhood of African men. Indigenous men were treated as children in need of control—“boy” was an everyday term. Resistance by men, not surprisingly, took the shape of an assertion of manhood. The ANC mobilized stories of heroic resistance

from the past and young men often interpreted joining the struggle as a form of initiation into manhood.

Such collective masculinity projects are widespread among resistance movements, giving prestige to young men on the front line, such as Palestinian youth in the intifada (Peteet 1994). Post-conflict, this can lead to severe problems, with continuing community violence in South Africa (Xaba 2001), Timor Leste (Myrntinen 2012), and other cases.

It is important to note, therefore, the other dimensions of gender in resistance movements. Suttner (2005) carefully documents emotionality, confronting of pain, and desire for the presence of children, dimensions given legitimacy by leaders such as Chris Hani. Very similar conclusions are reached by Ortega and Maria (2012) in an impressive study of militants in Latin American guerrilla movements. These movements had multiple forms of masculinity, a significant place for emotion, and an ideology of social equality that often gave women a prominent role. An oral-history study of gender issues in the Vietnamese wars for independence against the French and Americans is called *Even the Women Must Fight* (Turner and Hao 1998). Marnia Lazreg (1990, p. 768) says of the Algerian independence struggle that “the very fact that women entered the war willingly was in and of itself a radical break in gender relations.”

Yet Lazreg and Maria Mies (1986) have remarked how often national liberation movements mobilized women for struggle, but on gaining independence installed patriarchal regimes. A striking example is the anticolonial rising in Ireland.

Across Dublin, women were in combat in all the insurgent battalions except one. That one was commanded by Eamon de Valera, who sent the women home (Townshend 2005). After independence, with a conservative Catholicism ascendant, women were thoroughly marginalized in Irish public life. After de Valera himself became head of government, he brought in a Constitution that defined woman’s place as “within the home” (1937 Constitution, Article 41).

Postcolonial societies have often shown a “shifting terrain of gender relations,” as Linden Lewis (2004) puts it in his study of Caribbean masculinity. Fatima Mernissi’s pioneering fieldwork on masculinity (1975) found evidence of “sexual anomie” among young men in Morocco and great uncertainty in the transition between generations. In Egypt a couple of decades later, Mai Ghousoub (2000) found evidence of a great cultural disturbance in gender relations, and “a chaotic quest for a definition of modern masculinity.”

Discussing Iran under the neocolonial regime before the Islamic revolution, Al-e Ahmad (1962)

described a thin and rootless masculinity among the middle class, “a donkey in a lion’s skin.”

Not all changes in gender relations, however, were chaotic. Some were driven by the policies of developmental states. In the Turkish successor state to the Ottoman Empire, a military regime under the war hero Mustafa Kemal created a paradigm of secular development in which modernizing the position of women was a central, almost iconic, feature. But military masculinities remained hegemonic, with conscription as a rite of passage into manhood for generations of Turkish men (Sinclair-Webb 2000).

Economic development was another important arena of gender formation. Where steelmaking, machine manufacturing, and large-scale extractive industry were launched, industrial labor provided a central definition of working-class masculinity. Mike Donaldson (1991) showed this for Wollongong in settler-colonial Australia, noting how the gradual destruction of working bodies became part of the enactment of masculinity, demonstrating toughness and endurance. Dunbar Moodie’s (1994) study of gold mining in South Africa presents another striking case, with industrial militancy growing while older constructions of masculinity were displaced and family connections with pastoral homelands weakened.

Elite masculinities could change too, as they did in Japan. Starting in the Meiji era, a strong developmental state and a small group of powerful conglomerates, the *zaibatsu*, launched heavy industry and constructed finance, education, and weapon systems. For a time Japan became an imperial power. It is not surprising that a strongly-marked hegemonic model of masculinity on a national scale was produced, the corporate *sarariman* (Ito 1993; Dasgupta 2003). The model was based on stable long-term employment as a manager, a sharp gender division of labor in the home, and a steep hierarchy of authority in the workplace. These conditions eroded in the late twentieth century, accompanied by public debates about salaryman masculinity and greater recognition of diversity (Roberson and Suzuki 2003; Taga et al. 2011).

The social transformations in development, then, involved new waves of gender disordering, and new hegemonic projects. In Turkey and Japan this produced historically original constructions of masculinity that achieved hegemony at the national level. In other situations it seems that a sustainable hegemony was not achieved in the era of decolonization and development, though social dominance for groups of powerful men usually was.

MASCULINITIES IN NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT

Since the 1970s, development strategies in the periphery have diverged. Many countries under neoliberal regimes abandoned import replacement industrialization and turned to mining and agriculture to find “comparative advantage” in world markets. Others used low wages as their comparative advantage in manufacturing for export (Connell and Dados 2014). On both pathways, states and ruling classes in the periphery used the removal of social protections and the privatization of public assets to bolster their position in global markets.

Neoliberalism almost everywhere has been introduced by male elites, who have rolled back institutional protections and cultural gains by women, while promoting women’s labor force participation and a notionally de-gendered ideology of individual advancement. Gender segregation and gendered exploitation flourish in new forms in the factories of the “south China miracle,” the maquilas of the Mexican borderlands, the huge expatriate workforce of the oil industry in the Persian Gulf states, and among migrant domestic workers such as the baomu of capitalist China (Yan 2008).

Neoliberalism has had contradictory effects for masculinity formation. For large numbers of men, “structural adjustment” meant unemployment or casualization. Mara Viveros (2001) notes the impact across Latin America, especially the growing difficulty for working-class men in sustaining a breadwinner model of masculinity. South Africa has a similar experience (Hunter 2004), where the transition from apartheid to neoliberalism led to the collapse of secondary industry, with mass unemployment and an increasingly desperate situation for young Black men.

On the other hand, as neoliberal regimes concentrated the profits of development, they created conditions for the growth of entrepreneurial masculinities. The most spectacular examples are in China and India, where elite businessmen now control fortunes comparable to the great fortunes in the US/European metropole.

Yet the money and power of these new elites may not easily translate into achieved hegemony. Writing from post-communist Serbia, Marina Blagojevic (2013) notes how the pressures of the neoliberal era divide masculinities in the eastern European “semi periphery.” The dismantling of the state-centered economy, and dependence on Western Europe, threatened men who were bearers of old forms of hegemonic masculinity. Others, who have marketable assets or skills, position themselves in the neoliberal economy

and attempt to develop an international-style entrepreneurial masculinity. This split between hegemonic projects is not easily resolved locally.

Neoliberal development may also create, unexpectedly, local conditions for more egalitarian gender relations rather than more hierarchical ones. The violent neoliberal turn in Chile, for instance, created an export fruit industry that drew many women for the first time into wage-earning labor, and eroded patriarchal relations in rural families (Tinsman 2000).

Neoliberal development strategies in the periphery depend on the growth of global markets, global finance, and global communications. The consequence has been the creation of new social arenas in transnational rather than local space. These are powerfully gendered, though in new ways. Transnational manufacturing involves, as Juanita Elias (2008) has shown, a structure of relations between the professionalized masculinities of global corporate managements, local patriarchies in state and factory management, and gender-divided, often feminized, local workforces.

GLOBAL HEGEMONY AND CONTESTATION TODAY

The Offshore Metropole and Masculinity

The growth of European empire in past centuries depended on certain social conditions in the metropole: strong states organized for sustained warfare; ideologies of supremacy, first religious and then racial; population growth able to sustain a flow of bodies to the colonies; and a mercantile capitalism searching for unlimited profits. I will call the complex of institutions and cultural patterns and practices that enabled metropolitan societies to sustain empire the metropole-apparatus. The historical continuity of the metropole-apparatus underlies the coloniality of power and its persistence in the postcolonial world.

In the neoliberal era of globalization, the metropole-apparatus has, to a certain extent, broken free from the territorial states where it was originally based. The capacity to exercise global power is still connected to the wealth of Europe and North America and the military power of the United States. But metropolitan power increasingly operates offshore, through transnational institutions and spaces of a historically new kind: transnational corporations; global markets (especially finance markets, symbolized by the 24-hour operation of stock exchanges); international electronic media, including television and the Internet; and an international state, including both the United Nations complex and the linked-up military,

intelligence, and security apparatuses of NATO and other alliances.

The gender research in the metropole most relevant to understanding the contemporary metropole-apparatus concerns managerial masculinities. There is persuasive empirical work documenting power-oriented gender practices in both states and companies (Mulholland 1996; Wajcman 1999). Michael Roper's (1994) excellent history of managerial masculinities in British engineering firms traced changes in a local hegemonic masculinity, as managers' concerns shifted from the workforce and the production process to a neoliberal focus on finance and short-term profit. Richard Collier's (2010) careful study of corporate lawyers in Britain shows professional masculinities close to the patterns of corporate management—with possibilities of change, especially in the younger generation, held back by competitive pressures and the conservatism of their seniors.

Some recent studies have traced the gendered character of markets themselves as social institutions. An aggressive, misogynist occupational culture appears in arenas such as commodity and currency trading and financial manipulation generally (Levin 2001; McDowell 2010; Connell 2010a).

Top corporate management in the global economy is overwhelmingly the business of men. Of the five-hundred biggest international corporations listed in *Fortune* magazine's "Global 500" in 2014, 95.2% had a man as CEO. In many ways the social world of these men resembles the managerial masculinities documented in the old metropole—competitive and power-oriented. Elite managers persistently construct hierarchical relationships with women, whether wives, employees, or sex workers. A striking confirmation emerges from an international bank merger in Scandinavia, a region whose gender orders are among the most egalitarian on earth. Janne Tienari et al. (2005) conducted interviews with the top executives after the merger. The senior managers were almost all men, and did not want to hear about gender equality problems. They took management to be naturally men's business, "constructed according to the core family and male-breadwinner model."

But transnational business masculinity cannot simply reproduce historic bourgeois masculinity. The labor of TNC management is secularized, mobile, and highly technologized, being closely integrated with corporate intranets and high-technology communications (Connell 2010b). This is not a "geek" masculinity but it requires interaction with the changing masculinities of the ICT industries (Poster 2013). Because TNC management involves negotiations with local patriarchies (Elias 2008), it requires a degree of tolerance for differences in

culture; and there are indications this also applies to sexuality. A professionalization of management has been attempted through the US-style MBA, and elite business schools in the metropole take pride in having an international intake of students. Firms from relatively affluent countries in the periphery, such as Chile and Australia, mostly follow transnational managerial practice though they participate in global business on unequal terms (Olavarría 2009; Connell 2010a).

There seems, then, to be a changed hegemonic project of masculinity formation within the global corporate economy. This is not producing a kinder, more inclusive, or more feminized capitalism; a closer look at the masculinities of the main power-holding elites in the contemporary world shows the huge task still ahead for the project of gender equality (Connell 2016). But we do see hegemonic projects responding to the turbulence faced by global management and the impossibility of imposing any single gender template.

Contemporary Hegemonic Projects

As metropolitan power moves offshore into the complex of transnational institutions, the need for mechanisms of consent that produce hegemony at a local or national level declines. Are we now producing, on the scale of global society, the situation that Guha diagnosed in colonial India: hegemony an illusion and coercion the reality? Only in a few parts of the world do state or economic elites now rely on custom or claim oldestablished authority, and even where they do (e.g., in Thailand) the claim is fragile. Gone too is the old-style paternalism of improving public services or guaranteeing welfare to subaltern groups. The opposition to "Obamacare" from the political right in the United States is a striking example.

But a more limited and complex form of hegemony may be found on the world scale. Three conditions would be sufficient to sustain the position of transnational corporate masculinity:

1. The institutional complex—private property and state authority—currently delivering control of the global economy, remains socially accepted within the most powerful states. Although there is widespread discontent, seen in the 2016 Brexit vote and the Sanders campaign, no organized alternative has much traction in the United States or the European Union. Police-state repression in China and populist conservatism in India are currently well entrenched.

2. The self-selecting masculine elites now in power retain their legitimacy and organizational control within the new metropole-apparatus. The corporate

recovery from the 2007–2008 global financial crisis suggests the capacity for continuing control is there.

3. The metropole-apparatus connects well enough with national power structures in the periphery to allow continued extraction of raw materials, overseas trade and corporate operations, and to sustain compliant states, in the periphery (see Mbeki 2009, for diagnosis of Africa along these lines; Messerschmidt 2010 for the symbolic projection of masculinities by the US political elite).

Yet these conditions have to be worked on. The incessant busy-ness of corporate and political management, with its penumbra of bribery and intimidation and its sponsorship of violent interventions, show there is no automatic global control. The gender dynamics outlined in this article show many examples of tension and dis-articulation. The extension of the neoliberal human rights regime to issues of reproduction and sexuality, to take just one example, has been repeatedly opposed by the most patriarchal governments in the periphery (in UN population debates as recently as 2014). The Islamist insurgencies of recent years, from Afghanistan to Nigeria, are if anything more patriarchal than the regimes they confront.

The emerging world gender order is far from being a smoothly-running machine. Rather, it is a scene of conflicting hegemonic projects. It has multiple tiers, where different configurations of masculinity are at work, and come into conflict. Major gains for gender equality have been made in the last half century, notably in state provision of education for girls and the rising participation of women in wage work. Up to now, however, these changes have yielded only a little ground for democratic projects of change in masculinity.

Counter-Hegemony

Movements for change in masculinity, nevertheless, keep welling up. South Africa, for instance, remains a violent and unequal society, where gender inequalities are deeply implicated in the world's heaviest burden of HIV/AIDS (Epstein et al. 2004). But South Africa has also seen intense debates about changing masculinities, accompanied by local projects of change (Sideris 2005; Shefer et al. 2007; Ratele 2014). India too is a highly unequal society, yet has multiple sources of change among men, revealed in Radhika Chopra's books *From Violence to Supportive Practice* (2002) and *Reframing Masculinities* (2007).

Programs concerned with the reduction of violence or the prevention of AIDS are now widespread. They are found in Latin America (Zingoni 1998), in Africa

(e.g., Sonke Gender Justice, www.genderjustice.org.za), and in Southeast Asia and other regions (Lang et al. 2008; United Nations 2013). They have recently been linked internationally through the MenEngage network (www.menengage.org), which has sponsored two international conferences of activists, the most recent producing the "Delhi Declaration" of 2014. These projects represent a historic change, mobilizing men internationally for gender justice.

But to be realistic, they remain relatively small; and mostly follow concepts developed in the global North. As Dowsett (2003) noted in a study of AIDS prevention in Bangladesh, Anglophone categories such as "MSM," "identity," "heterosexuality," and even "men" may misrepresent local social realities. Over time, a greater concern with distinctive local experience and strategy has been developing. Melissa Meyer and Helen Struthers's media project [*Un*]covering Men: *Rewriting Masculinity and Health in South Africa* (2012) is an example of the creative work that results.

Das and Singh (2014) offer something even more striking. From more than a decade of NGO-based programmes in India, including the well-known Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW), they have generated a seven-point theory of change. This theory emphasizes the different starting-points in gender reform for men and women, the inevitability of resistance, and the strategies most likely to overcome it.

Do local gender-equality projects among men represent a counter-hegemonic strategy at the societal level? That question was raised by a team leading workshops about masculinity and violence in the very difficult environment of El Salvador, after a brutal civil war (Bird et al. 2007). Part of their answer is that local interventions bring out alternative practices and desires for peace that already exist in the society. Such possibilities can be seen in other places too (Haque 2013; Myrtilinen 2012).

However, the NGO format of social action has been problematic for feminists, because of the way it is integrated into neoliberal politics (Alvarez 1999). The NGOs specifically concerned with gender-based violence overwhelmingly depend on corporate charity, international aid programs, or national states. Published research reveals few connections between masculinity reform efforts and union activism, landless people's movements, environmental activism, or other movements that offer a significant challenge to corporate or state power. They seem, so far, no threat to the corporate masculinity of the new metropole. For such a challenge to develop would require a different structure of politics.

CONCLUSION

As Rachel Jewkes et al. (2015) show in a valuable current review, the concept of hegemonic masculinity informs much anti-violence activism and when carefully used can illuminate problems of strategy. Their argument is consistent with the approach adopted here of analyzing masculinities in terms of collective hegemonic projects, local, societal, and global.

I am arguing that the changing structures of imperialism and neoliberal global power are a vital part of our understanding of masculinities. They represent both the structural conditions of hegemonic projects now and the sedimented consequences of gender projects in the past. Hegemony cannot be presumed in the violent and exploitative social relations that constitute imperial and transnational gender orders. But hegemony is constantly under construction, renovation, and contestation.

In this contestation, intellectual struggle is required. Knowledge produced in the majority world and Southern perspectives on social relations and power are increasingly important for global gender politics. A notable example is provided by AMEGH, the Mexican Association for the Study of the Gender of Men, and the Colegio de la Frontera Norte. Their work has recently produced a powerful volume on the gendered violence in northern México, *Vida, muerte y resistencia en Ciudad Juárez* (2013).

Knowledge is not a substitute for action. But accurate knowledge and theoretical insight are priceless assets for action, when action is concerned with contesting power and achieving social justice. That was our hope in formulating the concept of hegemonic masculinity and remains the reason to build on it today.

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Introduction to Reading 6

The anthropologist Serena Nanda is widely known for her ethnography of India's Hijaras, titled *Neither Man nor Woman*. The article included here is from her more recent book on multiple sex/gender systems around the world. Nanda's analysis of multiple genders among Native North Americans is rich and detailed. As you read this piece, consider the long-term consequences of the failure of European colonists and early anthropologists to get beyond their ethnocentric assumptions so they could understand and respect the gender diversity of North American Indian cultures.

1. Why does Serena Nanda use the term *gender variants* instead of *two-spirit* and *berdache*?
2. What was the relationship between sexual orientation and gender status among American Indians whose cultures included more than two sex/gender categories? How about hermaphroditism and gender status?
3. Why was there often an association between spiritual power and gender variance in Native American cultures?

MULTIPLE GENDERS AMONG NATIVE AMERICANS

Serena Nanda

The early encounters between Europeans and Native Americans in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries brought together cultures with very different sex/gender systems. The Spanish explorers, coming from a Catholic society where sodomy was a heinous crime, were filled with contempt and outrage when they recorded the presence of men in Native North American societies who performed the work of women, dressed like women, and had sexual relations with men (Lang 1996; Roscoe 1995).

Europeans labeled these men *berdache*, a term originally meaning male prostitute. The term was both insulting and inaccurate, derived from the European

view that these roles centered on the “unnatural” and sinful practice of sodomy as defined in their own societies. This European ethnocentrism also caused early observers to overlook the specialized and spiritual functions of many of these roles and the positive value attached to them in many Native American societies.

By the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, some anthropologists included accounts of Native American sex/gender diversity in their ethnographies, attempting to explain the contributions alternative sex/gender roles made to social structure or culture. These accounts, though less contemptuous than earlier ones, nevertheless largely retained the ethnocentric

Nanda, S. (2014). Multiple genders among Native Americans. *Gender diversity: Crosscultural variations*, 2nd ed. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc. Copyright © 2014. All rights reserved.

emphasis on berdache sexuality, defining it as a form of “institutionalized homosexuality.” Influenced by functionalist theory, anthropologists viewed these sex/gender roles as functional because they provided a social niche for male individuals whose personality and sexual orientation did not match the definition of masculinity in the anthropologists’ societies, or because the roles provided a “way out” of the masculine or warrior role for “cowardly” or “failed” men (see Callender and Kochems 1983).

Increasingly, however, anthropological accounts paid more attention to the association of Native American sex/gender diversity with shamanism and spiritual powers; they also noted that mixed gender roles were often central and highly valued, rather than with European concepts of homosexuality (erotic feelings for a person of the same sex), transvestism (cross-dressing), or hermaphroditism (the presence of both male and female sexual organs in an individual) continued to distort their indigenous meanings, marginal and deviant within some Native American societies. Still, the identification of Native American sex/gender diversity

In Native American societies, the European homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy was not culturally relevant as a central or defining aspect of gender. While mixed sex/gender individuals in many Native American societies did engage in sexual relations and even married persons of the same sex, this was not central to their alternative gender role. Europeans also overemphasized the function of cross-dressing in these roles, labeling such individuals as *transvestites*; although mixed gender roles often did involve cross-dressing, this varied both within and among Native American societies. The label “hermaphrodite” was also inaccurate as a general category, although some societies did recognize biological intersexuality as the basis of sex/gender variation.

Given the great variation in Native North American societies, it is perhaps most useful to define their non-normative sex/gender roles as referring to people who partly or completely adopted aspects of the culturally defined role of the other sex or gender and who were classified as neither woman nor man but as mixed, alternative genders; these roles did not involve a complete crossing over to an opposite sex/gender role (see Callender and Kochems 1983:443).

Both Native American sex/gender diversity and anthropological understandings of these roles have shifted in the past 30 years (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang 1997: Introduction). Most current research rejects institutionalized homosexuality as an adequate explanation of Native American sex/gender diversity: It emphasizes occupation rather than sexuality as its

central feature; considers multiple sex/gender roles as normal, indeed often integrated into and highly valued in Native American sex/gender systems (Albers 1989:134; Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998); notes the variation in such roles across indigenous North (and South) America (Callender and Kochems 1983; Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998; Roscoe 1998); and calls attention to the association of such roles with spiritual power (Roscoe 1996; Williams 1992).

Consistent with these new perspectives, the term “berdache” is somewhat out of fashion, though there is no unanimous agreement on what should replace it. One widely accepted suggestion is the term *two-spirit* (Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998), a term coined in 1990 by urban Native American gays and lesbians. Two-spirit has the advantage of conveying the spiritual nature of gender variance in both traditional and contemporary Native American societies, although it emphasizes the Euro-American binary sex/gender construction of male and female/man and woman, which did not characterize all Native American groups.

DISTRIBUTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF VARIANT SEX/GENDER ROLES

Multiple sex/gender systems were found in many, though not all, Native American societies. Variant male sex/gender roles are documented for 110 to 150 societies, occurring most frequently in the region extending from California to the Mississippi Valley and the upper-Great Lakes, the Plains and the Prairies, the Southwest, and to a lesser extent along the Northwest Coast. With few exceptions, gender variance is not historically documented for eastern North America, though it may have existed prior to the European invasion and disappeared before it could be recorded historically (Callender and Kochems 1983; Fulton and Anderson 1992).

There were many variations in Native American sex/gender diversity. Some cultures included three or four genders: men, women, male variants, and female variants (e.g., biological females who, by engaging in male activities, were reclassified as to gender). Gender variant roles also differed in the criteria by which they were defined; the degree of their integration into the society; the norms governing their behavior; the way the role was publicly acknowledged or sanctioned; how others were expected to behave toward gender variant persons; the degree to which a gender changer was expected to adopt the role of the opposite sex or was limited in doing so; the power, sacred or secular, that was attributed to them; and the path to recruitment.

In spite of this variety, however, there were also some widespread similarities: transvestism, cross-gender occupation, same-sex (but different gender) sexuality, a special process or ritual surrounding recruitment, special language and ritual roles, and associations with spiritual power.

TRANSVESTISM

Transvestism was often associated with gender variance but was not equally important in all societies. Male gender variants frequently adopted women's dress and hairstyles partially or completely, and female gender variants partially adopted the clothing of men; in some societies, however, transvestism was prohibited. The choice of clothing was sometimes an individual matter, and gender variants might mix their clothing and their accessories. For example, a female gender variant might wear a woman's dress but carry (male) weapons. Dress was also sometimes situationally determined: a male gender variant would have to wear men's clothing while engaging in warfare but might wear women's clothing at other times. Similarly, female gender variants might wear women's clothing when gathering (women's work) but male clothing when hunting (men's work) (Callender and Kochems 1983:447). Among the Navajo, a male gender variant, *nàdleeh*, would adopt almost all aspects of a woman's dress, work, language, and behavior; the Mohave male gender variant, called *alyha*, was at the extreme end of the cross-gender continuum in imitating female physiology as well as transvestism. The repression and ultimately the almost total decline of transvestism was a direct result of U.S. prohibitions against it.

OCCUPATION

The occupational aspects of Native American gender variance was central in most societies. Most frequently a boy's interest in the tools and activities of women and a girl's interest in the tools of male occupations signaled an individual's wish to undertake a gender variant role (Callender and Kochems 1983:447; Whitehead 1981). In hunting societies, for example, female gender variance was signaled by a girl rejecting the domestic activities associated with women and participating in playing and hunting with boys. In the Arctic and sub-Arctic this might be encouraged by a girl's parents if there were not enough boys to provide the family with

food (Lang 1998). Male gender variants were frequently considered especially skilled and industrious in women's crafts and domestic work (though not in agriculture, where this was a man's task) (Roscoe 1991; 1996). Female gender crossers sometimes won the reputation of superior hunters and warriors.

The households of male gender variants were often more prosperous than others, sometimes because they were hired by whites. In their own societies the excellence of male gender variants' craftwork was sometimes ascribed to a supernatural sanction for their gender transformation (Callender and Kochems 1983:448). Female gender variants opted out of motherhood, so they were not encumbered by caring for children, which may explain their success as hunters or warriors. In Borne societies, gender variants could engage in both men's and women's work, and this, too, accounted for their increased wealth. Another source of income was payment for the special social activities due to gender variants' intermediate gender status, such as acting as go-betweens in marriage. Through their diverse occupations, then, gender variants were often central rather than marginal in their societies.

The explanation of male gender variant roles as a niche for "failed" or cowardly men who wished to avoid warfare or other aspects of the masculine role is no longer widely accepted. To begin with, masculinity was not associated with warrior status in all Native American cultures. In some societies, male gender variants were warriors, and in many others, males who rejected the warrior role did not become gender variants. Sometimes male gender variants did not go to war because of cultural prohibitions against their using symbols of maleness, for example, the prohibition against their using the bow among the Illinois. Where male gender variants did not fight, they sometimes had other important roles in warfare, like treating the wounded, carrying supplies for the war party, or directing postbattle ceremonials (Callender and Kochems 1983:449). In a few societies male gender variants became outstanding warriors, such as Finds Them and Kills Them, a Crow Indian who performed daring feats of bravery while fighting with the U.S. Army against the Crow's traditional enemies, the Lakota Sioux (Roscoe 1998:23).

GENDER VARIANCE AND SEXUALITY

While generally sexuality was not central in defining gender status among Native Americans, in some Native American societies, same-sex sexual desire or practices were significant in the definition of gender

variant roles (Callender and Kochems 1983:449). Some early reports noted specifically that male gender variants lived with and/or had sexual relations with women as well as with men; in other societies they were reported as having sexual relations only with men, and in still other societies, of having no sexual relationships at all (Lang 1998:189–95).

The bisexual orientation of some gender variant persons may have been a culturally accepted expression of their gender variance. It may have resulted from an individual's life experiences, such as the age at which he or she entered the gender variant role, and/or it may have been one aspect of the general freedom of sexual expression in many Native American societies. While male and female gender variants most frequently had sexual relations with, or married, persons of the same biological sex as themselves, these relationships were not considered homosexual in the contemporary Western understanding of that term. In a multiple gender system the partners would be of the same sex but different genders, and homogender, rather than homosexual, practices bore the brunt of negative cultural sanctions (as is true today, for example, in contemporary Indonesia). The sexual partners of gender variants were never considered gender variants themselves.

Among the Navajo there were four genders; man, woman, and two gender variants: the masculine female-bodied *nàdleeh* and the feminine male-bodied *nàdleeh* (Thomas 1997). A sexual relationship between a female-bodied *nàdleeh* and a woman or a sexual relationship between a male-bodied *nàdleeh* and a man were not stigmatized because these persons were of different genders, although they were of the same biological sex. A sexual relationship between two women, two men, two female-bodied *nàdleeh*, or two male-bodied *nàdleeh*, however, was considered homosexual, and even incestual, and was strongly disapproved of.

The relation of sexuality to variant sex/gender roles across North America suggests that sexual relations between gender variants and persons of the same biological sex were a result rather than a cause of gender variance. Sexual relationships between a man and a male gender variant were accepted in most Native American societies, though not in all, and appear to have been negatively sanctioned only when it interfered with child-producing heterosexual marriages. Gender variants' sexual relationships might be casual and wide-ranging (Europeans used the term "promiscuous"), or stable, and sometimes involved life-long marriages. In some societies, however, male gender variants were not permitted to engage in long-term

relationships with men, either in or out of wedlock, and many male gender variants were reported as living alone.

A man might desire sexual relations with a (male) gender variant for different reasons: In some societies taboos on sexual relations with menstruating or pregnant women restricted opportunities for sexual intercourse; in other societies sexual relations with a gender variant person were exempt from punishment for extramarital affairs; in still other societies, for example among the Navajo, some gender variants were considered especially lucky, and a man might hope to have this luck transferred to himself through sexual relations (Lang 1998:349).

BIOLOGICAL SEX AND GENDER TRANSFORMATIONS

European observers often confused gender variants with *hermaphrodites* (biologically intersexed persons). Some Native American societies explicitly distinguished hermaphrodites from gender variants and treated them differently; others assigned gender variant persons and hermaphrodites to the same alternative gender status. In most Native American societies biological sex (or the intersexed condition of the hermaphrodite) was not the criterion for a gender variant role, nor were the individuals who occupied gender variant roles anatomically abnormal. The Navajo were an exception: They distinguished between the intersexed and the alternatively gendered but treated them similarly, though not exactly the same (Hill 1935; Thomas 1997).

Even as the traditional Navajo sex/gender system had biological sex as its starting point, the Navajo *nàdleeh* were also distinguished by gender-linked behaviors, such as body language, clothing, ceremonial roles, speech style, and occupation. Feminine, male-bodied *nàdleeh* might engage in women's activities such as cooking, weaving, household tasks, and making pottery. Masculine, female-bodied *nàdleeh*, unlike other female-bodied persons, avoided childbirth; today they are associated with male occupational roles such as construction or fire-fighting (although ordinary women also sometimes engage in these occupations). Traditionally, female-bodied *nàdleeh* had specific roles in Navajo ceremonials (Thomas 1997).

Thus, even where hermaphrodites occupied a special gender variant role, Native American gender variance was defined more by cultural than biological criteria. In the recorded case of a physical examination of a gender variant male, the previously mentioned

Finds Them and Kills Them, his genitals were found to be completely normal (Roscoe 1998).

Native American gender variants were not generally conceptualized as hermaphrodites, but neither were they conceptualized as transsexuals (people who change from their original sex to the opposite sex). Gender transformations among gender variants were recognized as only a partial transformation, and the gender variant was not thought of as having become a person of the opposite sex/gender. Rather, gender variant roles were autonomous gender roles that combined the characteristics of men and women and had some unique features of their own. For example, among the Zuni a male gender variant was buried in women's dress but also in men's trousers on the men's side of the graveyard (Parsons, cited in Callender and Kochems 1983:454; Roscoe 1991:124, 145). Male gender variants were neither men—by virtue of their chosen occupations, dress, demeanor, and possibly sexuality—nor women, because of their anatomy and their inability to bear children. Only among the Mohave do we find the extreme imitation of women's physiological processes related to reproduction and the claims to have female sexual organs—both of which were ridiculed within Mohave society. Even here, however, where informants reported that female gender variants did not menstruate, this did not make them culturally men. Rather, it was the mixed quality of gender variant status that was culturally elaborated in Native North America and was the source of supernatural powers sometimes attributed to them.

SACRED POWER

The association between the spiritual power and gender variance occurred in most, if not all, Native American societies. Even where, as previously noted, recruitment to the role was occasioned by a child's interest in occupational activities of the opposite sex, supernatural sanction, frequently appearing in visions or dreams, was also involved, as among Prairie and Plains societies. These visions involved female supernatural figures, often the moon. Among the Omaha, the moon appeared in a dream holding a burden strap—a symbol of female work—in one hand, and a bow—a symbol of male work—in the other. When the male dreamer reached for the bow, the moon forced him to take the burden strap (Whitehead 1981). Among the Mohave, a child's choice of male or female implements heralding gender variant status was sometimes prefigured by a dream that was believed to come to an embryo in the womb (Devereux 1937).

In some but not all societies, sex/gender variants had sacred ritual roles and curing functions (Callender and Kochems 1983:453; Lang 1998). Where feminine qualities were associated with these roles, male gender variants might become spiritual leaders or healers, but where these roles were associated with masculine qualities they were not entered into by male gender variants. The Plains Indians, who emphasized a vision as a source of supernatural power, regarded male gender variants as holy persons, but California Indian societies did not. Moreover, in some Native American societies gender variants were specifically excluded from religious roles (Lang 1998:167). Nevertheless, sacred power was so widely associated with sex/gender diversity in Native North America that scholars generally agree that it is an important explanation of why such roles were so widespread.

In spite of cultural differences among Native American societies, some of their general characteristics are consistent with the positive value placed on sex/gender diversity and the widespread existence of multigender systems (Lang 1996). One cultural similarity is a cosmology (system of religious beliefs) in which transformation and ambiguity are recurring themes, applying to humans, animals, and objects in the natural environment. In many of these cultures, sex/gender ambiguity, lack of sexual differentiation, and sex/gender transformations are central in creation stories (Lang 1996:187). Native American cosmology may not be “the cause” of sex/gender diversity but it certainly (as in India) provides a hospitable context for it.

FEMALE GENDER VARIANTS

Female gender variants probably occurred more frequently among Native Americans than in other cultures, a point largely overlooked in the historic and ethnographic record (see Blackwood 1984; Jacobs et al. 1997; Lang 1998; Medicine 1983).

Although the generally egalitarian social structures of many Native American societies provided a hospitable context for female gender variance, it occurred in perhaps only one-quarter to one-half of the societies with male variant roles (Callender and Kochems 1983:446; see also Lang 1998:262–265). This may be explained partly by the fact that in many Native American societies women could—and did—adopt aspects of the male gender role, such as engaging in warfare or hunting, and sometimes dressed in male clothing, without being reclassified into a different gender (Blackwood 1984; Lang 1998:261ff; Medicine 1983). . . .

While most often Native American women who crossed genders occupationally . . . were not reclassified into a gender variant role, several isolated cases of female gender transformations have been documented historically. One of these is Ququnak Patke, a “man-like woman” from the Kutenai (Schaeffer 1965). Ququnak Patke had married a white fur trader, and when she returned to her tribe, she claimed that her husband had transformed her into a man. She wore men’s clothes, lived as a man, married a woman, and claimed supernatural sanction for her role change and her supernatural powers. Although whites often mistook her for a man in her various roles as warrior, explorer’s guide, and trader, such transformations were not considered a possibility among the Kutenai, and many thought Ququnak Patke was mad. She died attempting to mediate a quarrel between two hostile Indian groups.

Because sexual relations between women in Native American societies were rarely historically documented, it is hard to know how far we can generalize about the relation of sexuality to female gender variance in pre-contact Native American cultures. The few descriptions (and those for males, as well) are mainly based on ethnographic accounts that relied on twentieth-century informants whose memories were already shaped by white hostility toward gender diversity and same-sex sexuality. Nevertheless, it seems clear that although Native American female gender variants clearly had sexual relationships with women, sexual object choice was not their defining characteristic. In some cases, they were described “as women who never marry”; this does not say anything definitive about their sexuality and it may be that the sexuality of female gender variants was more variable than that of men.

Contact with whites opened up opportunities for gender divergent individuals, males as well as females (see Roscoe 1998; 1991). Overall, however, as a result of Euro-American repression and the growing assimilation of Euro-American sex/gender ideologies, Native American female and male gender variant roles largely disappeared by the 1930s, as the reservation system was well under way. Yet, their echoes may remain, both in the anthropological interest in this subject and in the activism of contemporary two-spirit individuals.

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TOPICS FOR FURTHER EXAMINATION

- Visit the websites of aidsd.org, [interACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth](https://interACT.org), and www.interfaceproject.org to learn more about intersex and intersex activism. In addition, see coverage of sex, gender, intersex, and transgender in popular magazines such as *National Geographic* (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/>

magazine/2017/01/) and *Scientific American* (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-new-science-of-sex-and-gender/>).

- Google *The Society Pages* (<https://thesocietypages.org>) and *Sociological Images at The Society Pages* (<https://thesocietypages.org/sociimages/>) for short and informative articles on topics such as “gendering intelligence” and gendering objects/products. Gender bending in the arts has a long tradition.
- What can we learn about gender and sexual identity from the work of fine arts photographers such as Samuel Fosso, Marie Hoag & Bolette Berg, JJ Levine, and Yijun Liao? Look at gender bending work in other domains of the arts, including music videos. How does gender bending art work contribute to our understanding of gendered roles, relations, and structures?

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