



# INTERACTIONIST VIEWS OF GENDER





# *Interactionist Approach*

What is this?



focus less on the individuals and more on the social context within which individuals interact



places greater attention on forces operating outside the individual.

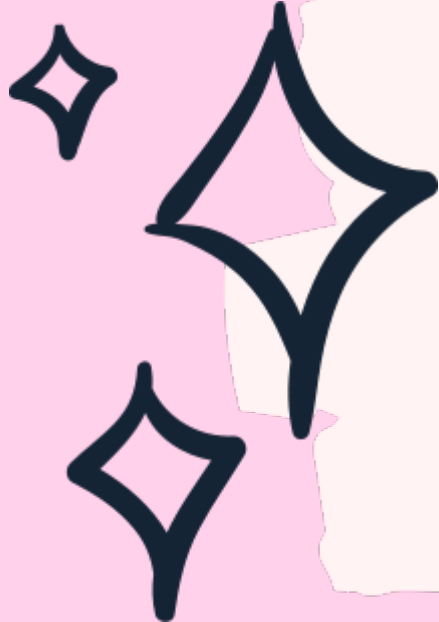


argues that people's reactions and behaviors vary in response to the social context.



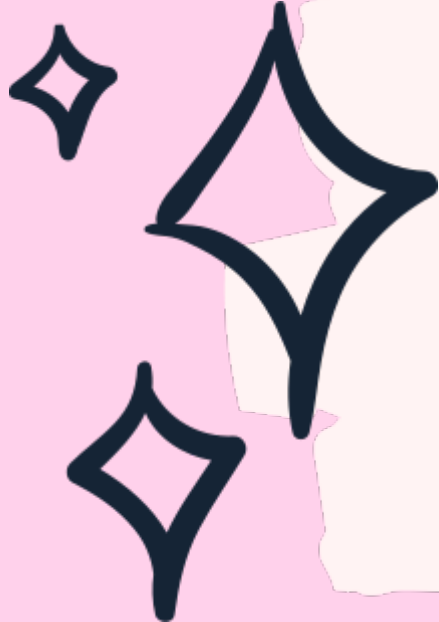
Views social categorization as essential to the interaction

# *Social Context*



includes the other participants in a setting  
and features of the environment where the  
interaction takes place.

# *Social Categorization*



refers to the processes through which individuals classify others and themselves as members of particular groups.



# Three Types of Interactionist Approaches:



Ethnomethodological  
Views: “doing gender”



Status  
Characteristics  
Theory




Homophily  
Approach




# Ethnomethodological views: “doing gender”


(West and Zimmerman 1987)



argues that social interaction is the vehicle through which people present themselves to others as women or men.



gender or, rather, the belief that the world is divided into two, mutually exclusive categories – is understood as an “accomplishment” – a product of human effort.



believes that sex categorization is a habitual, virtually automatic, and rarely questioned aspect of social interaction.



# Ethnomethodological views: “doing gender”

(West and Zimmerman 1987)

West and Fenstermaker (1995) recently extended this view: “Doing difference” is their attempt to describe the exercise of power and production of inequality more generally, not just in relation to gender.

claim that because sex categories are always present, they are always available as a basis for interpreting others’ behavior.

gender is being “done” always and everywhere

# Status Characteristics Theory (Expectation States)

- emphasize the ways in which sex categories become the basis for people's expectations about others' competence.
- Interaction requires that people orient themselves to one another, it is necessary to have some basis for categorizing others vis-à-vis oneself (Ridgeway 1997)
- To explain why and how categorizing others by sex produces gender expectations and stereotypes, these theorists introduce the idea of a status characteristic.





# Status Characteristics Theory (Expectation States)

A status characteristic is “an attribute on which individuals vary that is associated in a society with widely held beliefs according greater esteem and worthiness to some states of the attribute (e.g., being male) than others (being female)” (Ridgeway 1993: 179).




Once a characteristic like sex category has status value, it begins to shape expectations and form the basis for stereotypes.



Gender is not the only basis on which people differentially assign power and status, age is also a status characteristic; adults are generally ascribed more status and power than children.



# Status Characteristics Theory (Expectation States)



EXPECTATION states theory recognizes that multiple status characteristics may be activated in any given situation.

RECOGNIZES THAT THE EFFECTS OF  
GENDER ON SOCIAL INTERACTION  
MAY VARY FROM SITUATION TO  
SITUATION



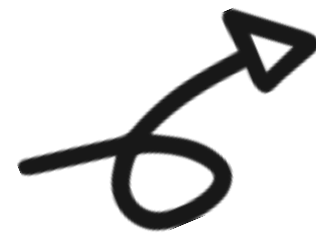
# Homophily Approach



- emphasizes the consequences of people classifying others as similar or different from themselves.
- assumes that being different from or similar to others is more important in shaping interaction than how one differs or is similar.
- term used to describe people's preference for sameness, a preference that is expressed in their interpersonal relations.
- When sociologists say that similarity attracts, they mean that people are drawn to those whose attitudes, values, and beliefs are similar to their own.
- People who share our views affirm us, thus positively reinforcing who we are and how we live.

# HOMOPHILY APPROACH

“skewed groups”  
(Kanter 1977: 208)



one social type is numerically  
dominant and the other is a very  
small numerical minority (e.g., 15  
percent or less)







LOOK AT THESE

## Skewed groups

This is likely to be the situation experienced by “newcomers” to a social setting

## Example

Women who enter jobs or workplaces historically dominated by men, for example, are apt to enter as a minority of this type, as are people of color who enter jobs historically dominated by whites. Because it is unlikely that an employer would hire large numbers of women or people of color at one time, sex (and race) integration happens slowly, one or two people at a time.





LOOK AT THESE

## Example

Members of the numerical minority in skewed groups are called tokens.

## Tokens

This term is not pejorative, nor does it refer to people who are assumed to have been hired because of their sex or race. Token is a neutral label



Kanter argues that relations between tokens and dominants in skewed groups are shaped by three perceptual tendencies: visibility, contrast, and assimilation.

### Visibility

First, tokens – because they are different from the majority – are easily noticed. Token women in high-level positions. Moreover, tokens’ behavior was often attributed more to their social category membership than to their own individual characteristics. Thus, tokens carry an extra burden: they represent their entire social category (Kanter 1977).

### Contrast

is the second perceptual tendency associated with tokenism. As Kanter notes, "the presence of a token or two makes dominants more aware of what they have in common at the same time that it threatens that commonality" (1977: 221–2).

### Assimilation

The third perceptual tendency associated with tokenism is assimilation. Dominants see tokens less as individuals and more as representative members of their social category. Moreover, because the characteristics dominants associate with a token’s social category are often overly simplified or inaccurate stereotypes, assimilation contributes to the dominants’ misperceptions of the token.



# INSTITUTIONALISTIC VIEWS OF GENDER



# ORGANIZATION

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- is a social unit established to pursue a particular goal.
- have boundaries, rules, procedures, and means of communication (Hall 2002).
- The social practices that are associated with organizations play an especially important role in the production and reproduction of gender and gender inequality.



# INSTITUTION

is “an organized, established pattern” or even more simply, “the rules of the game” (Jepperson 1991: 143).



# Institution

Each major social institution is organized according to what Friedland and Alford call “a central logic – a set of material practices and symbolic constructions” (1991: 248). These logics thus include structures, patterns, and routines, and they include the belief systems that supply these with meaning.



# An institution is gendered when...

1. Gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life.



2.

have been historically developed by men, currently dominated by men, and symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of men in leading positions, both in the present and historically (1992:567).

3.

From this perspective, aspects of social life that are conventionally treated as “genderless” or gender-neutral are, in fact, expressions of gender.



## Examples of Gendered Institutions



Sports and Education. Gender permeates virtually all of these aspects of sport. Organized sports has favored men over women (Birrell and Cole 1994; Messner and Sabo 1990). Sport helps to create ideas about male and female bodies and their physical capabilities or limitations. While in Higher Education, the sex composition of the faculty and the type of institution a student attends are related.



# Important aspects of institutions:

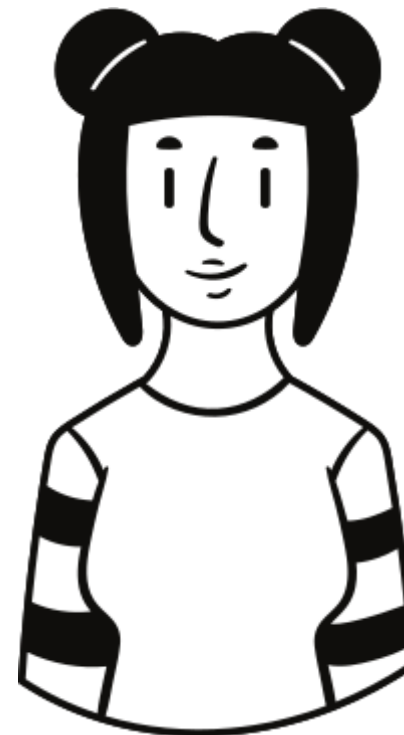
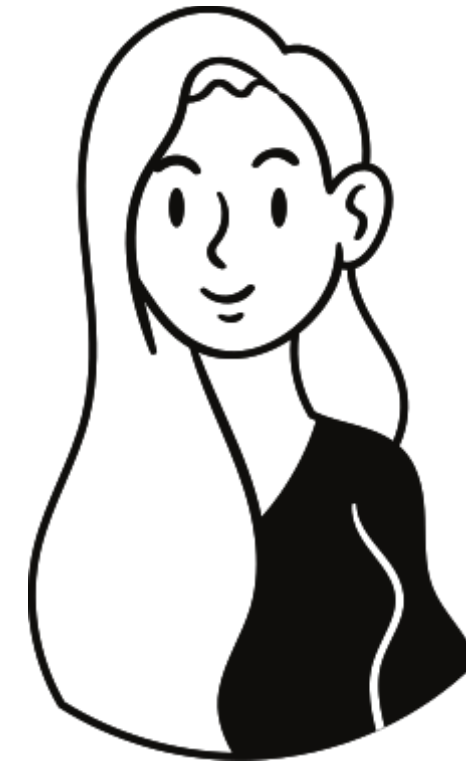
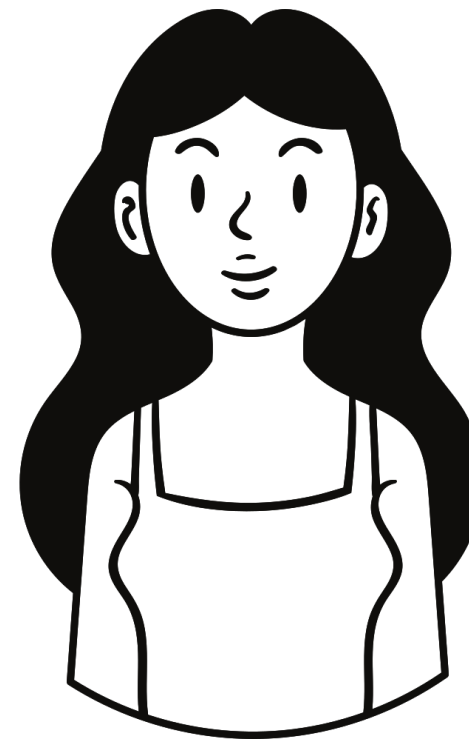
1. Institutions are an important source of cultural beliefs about the social world, including beliefs about gender. Institutions provide scripts that become guides for action. Beliefs about gender also feed back into these institutions, shaping their organization and practices.
2. Institutions revealed in the examples of sport and education, is that they tend to be self-perpetuating, almost taking on a life of their own.
3. Because institutions are taken for granted, they produce a socially shared “account” of their existence and purpose.



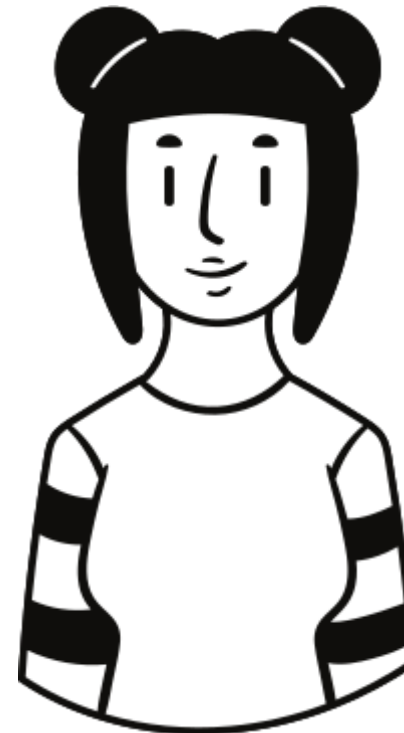
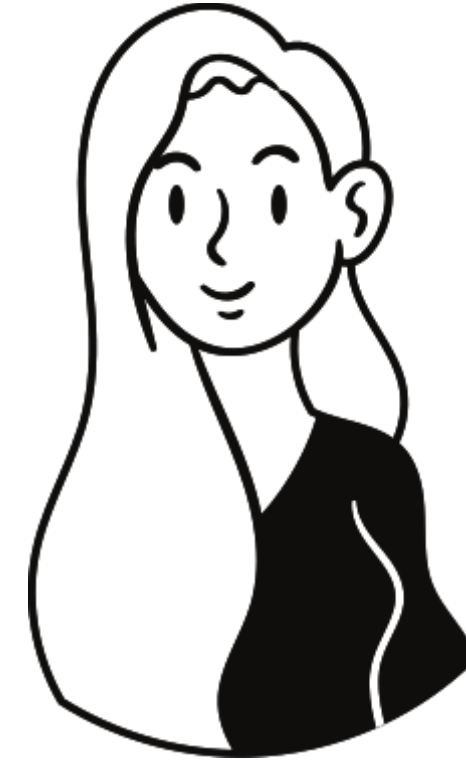
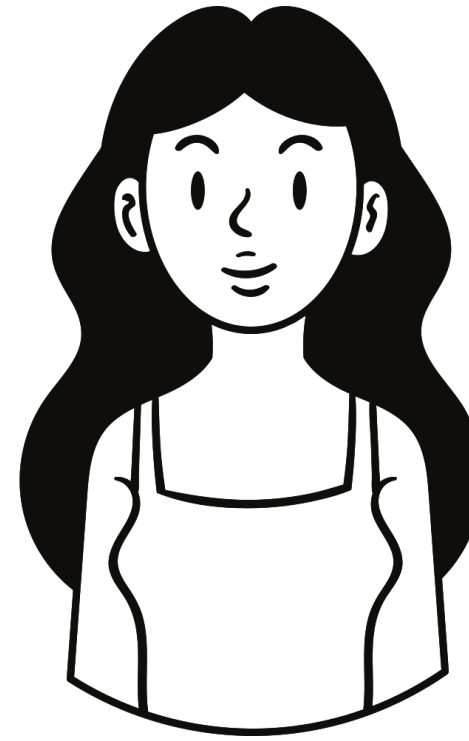
# MULTILAYERED CONCEPTION OF GENDER



Gender  
is a multilayered  
system of practices  
and relations that  
operates at all levels  
of the social world  
(Ridgeway and Smith-  
Lovin 1999; Risman  
1998).



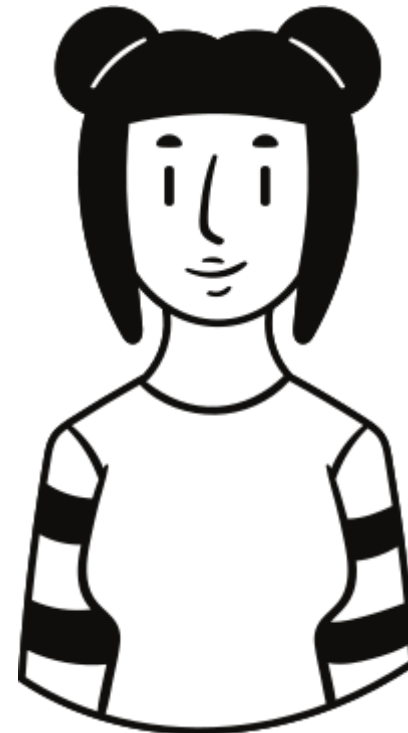
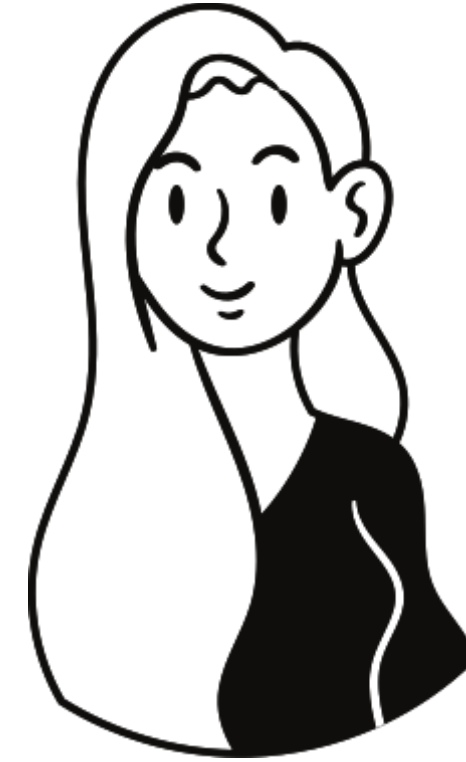
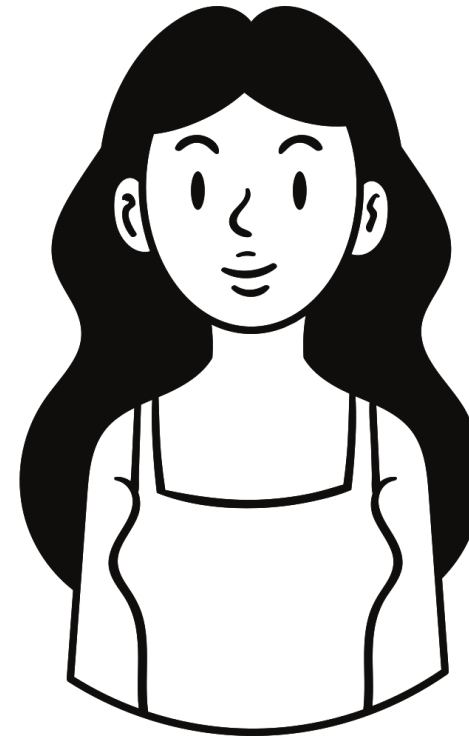
As  
a multilevel system  
affecting individuals'  
identities and  
characteristics,  
patterns of social  
interaction, and social  
institutions, the gender  
system  
shapes social life in  
crucial ways.





Gender is a  
multilayered system,  
operating at the  
individual,  
interactional, and  
institutional levels.

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Thank You for  
listening!