Changes in the Gender Structure: Inequality at the Individual, Interactional, and Macro Dimensions

William J. Scarborough and Barbara J. Risman
University of Illinois at Chicago

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Abstract:

As a society, we’ve made tremendous progress towards gender equality over the past several decades. Yet, there remains significant inequality between women and men. Furthermore, when we look closely at some of the progress made towards gender equality, we find it considerably less impressive than surface appearances. In this article, we review the updated framework of Risman’s (2017) gender structure theory and argue that it can help us make sense of the progress we’ve made as well as analyzing inequality as it persists between women and men. Using gender structure theory, we then show how gender is simultaneously reproduced and contested across the individual, interactional, and macro levels of society within three major social domains: work, family, and gender identity.
Changes in the Gender Structure: Inequality at the Individual, Interactional, and Macro Dimensions

There has been much progress toward gender equality in the U.S. Today, women make up half of the paid workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). The gender gap in earnings has shrunk dramatically – women’s earnings were only 62 percent of men’s in 1962, while today that number has increased to 81 percent (BLS 2014). The gender gap in educational attainment has entirely reversed, with women now obtaining a greater portion of both high school and college degrees than men (DiPrete and Buchmann 2013). In the home, the gender gap in time spent on both childcare and housework is the lowest it’s ever been (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie 2006).

If we look closer at these indicators of gender equality, however, we still find reason for concern. Much of women’s progress in the labor force has occurred within the expanding service-sector (Charles and Grusky 2004) where jobs are more likely to be part time, without benefits, and low paying (Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000). While the gender gap in earnings has decreased over the past several decades, the wage penalty associated with being a mother has not diminished (Avellar and Smock 2003) and the earnings gap for women of color relative to white men is far greater than that for white women (Misra and Murray-Close 2014). In fact, recent evidence indicates that pay gaps for women of color may even be getting worse (Mandel and Semyonov 2016). In the home, while married men are doing more childcare and housework than ever before, research has found that men’s childcare is often performed in tandem with their child’s mother and centered on play, while women do more routine childcare like cooking and hygiene (Coltrane 2004; Craig 2006; Fuligini and Brooks-Gunn 2004; Rehel 2014). Similarly, men’s housework tends to be based on periodic do-it-yourself projects, while women do more of the weekly cleaning (Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011).
How do we make sense of these dynamic patterns of gender progress and remaining inequality? In this article, we present gender structure theory as a framework for understanding gender in the various domains of work, family, and personal identity. As Risman has argued elsewhere (2017), we believe that conceptualizing gender as a multi-dimensional structure with individual, interactional, and macro-level processes can help us explain both the progress that we’ve observed in gender equality and, more importantly, the reasons why there remains much gender inequality today. While gender structure theory has been around for some time (Risman 2004), recent revisions to the theory (Risman 2017, forthcoming) that differentiate between cultural and material processes taking place at each social dimension provide reason to revisit this theoretical framework and use it to shed light on the dynamics of gender progress, stability, and contestation. In the following section, we will briefly outline the main tenets of the recently updated gender structure theory by using empirical examples. Next, we will apply this theoretical lens to gendered patterns in the labor force and the family. Finally, we use gender structure theory to review recent political issues around genderqueer and transgender identity that have been debated across the U.S. We close this article by positioning our contribution within the current social-political climate.

GENDER STRUCTURE THEORY

Risman’s (2017) recently updated gender structure theory synthetizes previous theories into a multi-dimensional framework. Based on an understanding of structure as a dialectical process where causality is recursive (Giddens 1984), Risman views gender as a structure that constitutes individuals’ personal orientations, interpersonal interactions, and macro-level patterns. Structure, in this approach, does not stand alone having an autonomous determinative influence upon peoples’ lives. Instead, there is a reflexive relationship between structure and
individual action, such that individual action is always responding to existing structures in ways that either reinforce or challenge them. Viewing gender as a structure allows for us to understand the way gender shapes ongoing practices at the individual, interactional, and macro level, and how it is through these practices that gender as a structure is sustained, challenged, and reproduced.

Understanding gender as a structure becomes clearer when we consider the interrelation between individual-, interactional-, and macro- dimensions. These three conceptual aspects of the gender structure are mutually constitutive and reflexive. The primary way Risman has updated gender structure theory in its most recent formulation is by integrating a consideration of the material and cultural processes that operate at each level of analysis. Material processes are based upon physical bodies, laws, or geographical locations and how these impact social lives. Cultural processes are ideological or socially constructed ideas that orientate peoples’ perspectives and worldviews. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the three dimensions of the gender structure and the material and cultural processes operating within and between each dimension.

[SUGGESTED PLACEMENT OF FIGURE 1]

The individual level of the gender structure emphasizes the processes involved in the development of gendered selves and gendered ways of cognitively interpreting the social world. On the side of material processes, biological forces play a small, but significant, part in the formation of gendered personalities and selves. In a unique panel study following women from before birth (through prenatal hormone testing) to adulthood, Davis and Risman (2015) found that levels of pre-natal testosterone accounted for a significant, but small percent of the variance in self-reported femininity and masculinity. While feminist gender researchers often downplay
the role of biological processes in gender (and for good reason, since claims about ‘natural’ body functions have been historically used to marginalize and oppress women (Ehrenreich and English 1973)), this and other recent studies (Auyeung et al. 2009; Hines et al. 2002; Jordan-Young 2011; also see Wade 2013) have shown that in utero hormonal levels may play a small if significant role in the formation of gendered personalities. Cultural processes, on the other hand, have been shown to be quite influential in individuals’ development of gendered selves. Theories of personality development focus on the influence of social culture in the way women and men form gendered personalities. Bem’s (1993) enculturation theory, for example, argues that by virtue of growing up in a society where gender differentiation is ubiquitous, where men have more power and resources than women, people learn to interpret social phenomena in gendered ways and internalize such patterns as they become gendered cultural natives. Other scholars have elaborated on Bem’s theory, showing how young children make sense of their surroundings by interpreting gendered cues from those around them such as parents (Leavell et al. 2012; Lytton and Romney 1991) and teachers (Gilliam et al. 2016; Martin 1998; Morris 2012).

Material and cultural processes also take place at the interactional dimension of the gender structure. Here, we find the effect of culture in how stereotypes implicitly frame the way individuals interpret the behavior of others so that we more readily see men as competent and more skilled than women (Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). An experiment by Correll and colleagues (2007) shows just how harmful stereotypes can be in the job search process. By matching resumes and job applications on all criteria except for an indicator signifying that the applicant was a mother, Correll and colleagues found that mothers received less than half as many call backs from potential employers than non-mothers. Beyond cognitive bias and stereotypes, cultural processes of gender are also the basis by which interpersonal
relationships are performed. West and Zimmerman’s (1987) theory of “Doing Gender” highlights the way individuals hold each other accountable to behave in ways consistent with what we would expect a woman or a man to do. When women behave in a directive manner, for example, they may receive sanctions from others for transgressing their expectations for how a woman should behave (Eagly 2007). In addition to cultural processes, material processes also influence gendered interactions. The numerical representation of men and women can have an impact on social relationships and organizational policy. Research has found that as the proportion of women managers and corporate board members increase, so does gender equity for employees located below them in organizational hierarchies (Cohen and Huffman 2007; Cook and Glass 2014, 2015; Huffman, Cohen, and Pearlman 2010; Skaggs, Stainback, and Duncan 2012; Stainback, Kleiner, and Skaggs 2015). Control over resources, such as household assets (Scarborough, Risman, and Meola 2017) or income (Gupta 2007; Sullivan and Gershuny 2016) constitute another material factor shaping gender inequality in things like childcare and housework within heterosexual relationships.

The macro dimension of the gender structure focuses on the material rules and regulations that constrain human activity. Federal legislation creates laws and regulations that can dramatically alter patterns of gender inequality. The passing of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the Education Amendments, for example, paved the way for women’s entry into higher education and more equal opportunity in paid labor (Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). In addition to the material effects of federal legislation, cultural processes play a large role at the macro dimension of the gender structure. Here, we turn our focus to dominant cultural ideologies about what it means to be a woman or a man. Hegemonic ideals of masculinity defined by the repudiation of homosexuality are ubiquitous cultural ideologies
shaping not only the relationships between women and men, but also the relationships among men and women. Research has found that the pursuit of such cultural ideals of masculinity or femininity influences men’s propensity for violence (Messerschmidt 2012), the popularity of media that reinforces gender inequality (Burke 2016; Hatfield 2010), youths’ enactment of gender scripts in high school (Pascoe 2007), and even men’s and women’s attitudes towards health practices (Sennott and Angotti 2016). Gendered cultural logics about work and family also influence women and men’s options throughout the life-cycle. For women, balancing work and family often means justifying their decision to work by explaining that it is “for the family” in order to meet the normative ideal that women are self-sacrificial and family-centered (Damaske 2011).

Gender structure theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding the way gender is reproduced through cultural and material processes taking place at individual, interactional, and macro dimensions. At the same time, gender structure theory emphasizes how processes at one dimension influence those taking place in another. For example, macro-level programs such as educational initiatives by the federal government encouraging young women to learn science and math can help develop individual-level preferences among young women to pursue jobs in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. Yet, the potential for change inspired by such macro and individual processes could ultimately be stunted by interactional processes – as women who study or work in STEM fields often face discrimination by their colleagues, increasing the chance that they will leave the field for one that is less hostile toward women. By thinking about gender as a multi-dimensional framework with cultural and material forces, we can start to make sense of dynamic patterns of change, both toward more equality and the push-back against it.
But the gender structure does not operate in isolation from other systems of inequality, such as race, class, and sexuality. Theories of intersectionality (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005) have been used in sociology to show how multiple social systems affect the opportunities, constraints, challenges, and rewards of individuals occupying simultaneous positions of disadvantage and/or privilege. Intersectional frameworks have also been used to shed light on the way systems of inequality can be co-constitutive (Glenn 1999; Choo and Ferree 2010). For example, previous research has shown how the feminization and stereotypes around the sexual morality of Asians in the U.S. and British Territories has been a key mechanism for this group’s racial subjugation (Chen 1999; Kim 2008; Lowe 2015; Pyke and Johnson 2003). Indeed, the intersectional processes between systems of gender, race, sexuality, and class have been so widely acknowledged in the field of sociology that it is no longer appropriate to conceptualize the gender structure as having autonomous affects. Instead, the gender structure exists within multiple structures of inequality that may differ in form, but are interrelated and co-constitutive of one another. Recent work, for example, has found that gendered expectations at the interactional level of the gender structure are held to racialized standards where white masculinity and femininity is seen as “just right”, while the expectations for blacks are overly masculinized and Asians overly feminized (Chavez and Wingfield, forthcoming; Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz 2013). Such cutting-edge research pushes intersectional understanding forward by illustrating the dynamic mechanisms involved in the co-construction of gender and race inequality. While this work suggests race and gender may be co-constitutive at the interactional level, Brubaker’s (2016) recent manuscript suggests that at the individual-level, gendered and racial identities may draw on quite different cultural discourses. Culturally, claims to gender identity are less rooted in one’s identification with community or ancestry. This allows
individuals to identify with their inner subjective gender that is not defined by physiology, but deeply felt essential authenticity. Racial identity claims, on the other hand, are culturally validated by one’s association with community and/or ancestry. These differences between gender and race identification, according to Brubaker, are why we more readily see the acceptance of transgender than transracial identities.

Recent literature highlights the differences, similarities, and co-constitutive nature of race and gender inequality. Our focus on the gender structure does not suggest that we think that gendered mechanisms are primary or any more important than other systems of inequality. In fact, we believe that achieving gender equality will require that we achieve other forms of equality as well. By adopting the analytical framework of gender structure theory, we can shed light on the specifically gendered processes involved in inequality and open up dialogue that complicates these explanations in efforts to expand upon the problematic patterns we highlight. Furthermore, while gender is shaped by other systems of inequality, we would be remiss to “water down” it’s effects by reducing them to other systems. As Bonilla-Silva (1996) said with regards to his theory of racialized social systems “Although [race] interacts with class and gender structures in the social system, it becomes an organizing principle of social relations in itself. Race, as most analysts suggest, is a social construct, but that construct, like class and gender, has independent effects on social life” (1996: 475). Our approach to analyzing gender mirrors that of Bonilla-Silva’s. By focusing on the gendered material and cultural processes operating at the individual, interactional, and macro-levels of society, not only can we improve our understanding of the gendered aspects of inequality, but we also set the foundation for future studies that expand on this work by exploring, more explicitly, the intersections of other systems of inequality. In the following three sections, we will use the lens of gender structure theory to
examine what change has occurred and what inequality remains in the social realms of work, family, and gender identity/fluidity. We focus on these areas because they constitute terrains where gender has been contested since the 2nd wave of the feminist movement. We incorporate research on diverse populations to insure attention to other axes of inequality.

GENDER CHANGE AND STABILITY IN PAID LABOR

We have made great progress toward gender equality in the labor force but we have much work still to do. On one hand, women today make up half of all employed persons, a dramatic improvement from the 1950s when less than a third of women worked for pay (BLS 2014). Not only are women moving in to the workforce, but they’re also moving up, occupying 52 percent of all management, professional, and related positions (BLS 2014). On the other hand, there is good reason to remain concerned about gender inequality in paid labor. Full time working women earn, on average, only 81 percent what men make, and this figure has not improved in the past decade (BLS 2014). While women have made inroads into managerial and professional jobs, they remain largely underrepresented in the highest paying occupations (Purcell et al. 2010). Gender segregation, while improved from the past, remains stark. Today, half of all workers would have to move jobs in order to integrate American workplaces (Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback 2007).

To make sense of the progress and remaining gender inequality we can point to processes taking place at the individual-, interactional-, and macro-dimensions of the gender structure. At the macro-dimension, there are two key material processes that have been game changers for gender inequality in paid labor. First, the regulatory capacity of the federal government to enforce anti-discrimination policies has greatly influenced the willingness of firms to make efforts at improving workplace gender and race diversity. In the wake of the civil rights
movement and in the midst of the feminist movement, there was a considerable amount of public
pressure on the federal government to address employment discrimination. As a result, the Equal
Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was empowered during this time to investigate
and litigate against employers that were accused of treating women or racial minorities unfairly.
It was during this period that we observed tremendous gains in workplace desegregation
(Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). Yet, a backlash against federal regulation during the
Reagan Era of the 1980s led to a diminishment of the EEOC, severely restricting its ability to
regulate employers. As government oversight lessened in the 1980s, the pace of change slowed
for women’s upward mobility and workplace integration (Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey
2012). In addition to government regulation, macro-economic shifts in the U.S. from industrial to
post-industrial markets have also played a key role in shaping the kinds of opportunities
available to women in the labor force. In fact, much of women’s increasing labor force
participation was made possible through the increasing availability of jobs in the growing service
sector rather than through integrating the jobs that men traditionally occupied (Charles and
Grusky 2004; Tomaskovic-Devey et al. 2006). While women were obtaining a larger share of
management jobs, the type of industries where men and women manage remain distinct. This
new form of inequality marks the development of horizontal segregation where women and men
may be equal in professional title, but work in different sectors (Charles and Grusky 2004).
Equality of occupational titles within horizontal segregation isn’t really equality when the
industries where women work offer less pay, fewer benefits, and are far more vulnerable than the
industries where men usually work (Charles and Grusky 2004; Kalleberg et al. 2000).
Cultural processes at the macro-dimension of the gender structure also play a role in
gender inequality in the labor force. The cultural notion of the ideal worker has shaped both the
design of jobs as well as the expectations employees face. As Acker (1990) pointed out in her path-breaking article on gendered organizations, the ideal worker norm is based on a conception of workers who devote all their time to a work organization because they have a wife at home who is taking care of the house and raising the children. That is, the possibility of a 24/7 workplace presumes that workers have wives, or do not need them (e.g. have no family care responsibilities). The expectations maintained by ideal worker norms disadvantage women by holding them to expectations that they be an ideal worker while at their job and an ideal mother while at home – an impossible double bind that undermines women’s success at work and their happiness at home (Hochschild 1989, 2001; Damaske 2011).

Within workplaces, gender inequality is continually reproduced through cultural and material processes at the interactional dimension of the gender structure. As noted earlier in this article, stereotypes associated with women and, in particular, mothers continue to disadvantage women in job applications and work entry (Correll et al. 2007; Ridgeway 2011). But even after women start working in a certain job, cultural processes of gender can undermine their success. Day-to-day harassment, both overt and subtle, can create a hostile work environment for women (Kanter 1983; Martin 2003). Even in jobs in industries seen as progressive, such as the tech industry, women’s opportunities are constrained by the gendered expectations held by their male colleagues. Interviewing women working in San Francisco tech companies, for example, Alfrey and Twine (2017) show that women with feminine self-presentation were ignored by colleagues in team meetings, denied credit for their work contributions, and faced hostile scrutiny during the fulfillment of their work responsibilities. By contradicting the dominant cultural stereotype of the white male tech programmer, feminine women in these roles were subject to daily slights that undermined their advancement.
Cultural processes at the interactional dimension take place alongside material processes such as the uneven numerical representation of men and women in a job. The salience of gender stereotypes in work groups, for example, depends in part on the number of men and women who are represented. When there is only one or two token women in a work-setting, these women are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of stereotypes by their colleagues (Kanter 1983). Other research has found that women’s representation in management reduces both the gender wage gap (Cohen and Huffman 2007) and levels of gender segregation (Stainback, Kleiner, and Skaggs 2015; Stainback and Kwon 2012). These studies suggest that when women are in positions of influence, they sometimes act as “agents of change” to promote policies that improve gender equity (Cohen and Huffman 2007).

Interactional and macro-level processes are not deterministic. Cultural and material factors at the individual dimension of the gender structure also play a role in explaining labor force inequality. Peoples’ preferences for certain occupations are heavily shaped by cultural predispositions that begin to develop at a young age. Several scholars have highlighted how the combined cultural values of individualism and gender essentialism influence the propensity for women and men to follow gendered educational and career paths, even if they hold feminist political opinions (Cech 2013; Charles and Bradley 2009; England 2010). These individual preferences contribute to patterns where traditionally masculine-typed blue-collar jobs remain dominated by men while management jobs in the growing service sector have been more heavily integrated by women. Of course, interactional discrimination in male-dominated occupations also deters women’s entry (Crawley 2011). Complicating matters, research suggests racial differences in these gendered pathways, with non-white men being more likely to enter low-
paying feminine-typed jobs as de-industrialization decreases the availability of manufacturing jobs (Yavorsky, Cohen, and Qian 2016).

At the individual level of analysis, external credentials also matter. In her examination of wage inequality throughout the U.S., McCall (2001) found that most of the labor market gains for women between 1979 and 1989 occurred for those with a college degree. Women who did not have a college degree experienced far less growth in wages and benefited much less from regional industrial shifts such as the transition from manufacturing to technological or service oriented sectors. Indeed, across many measures of gender inequality, women with a college degree fare much better than those without, just as men with college degrees fare better than those without (Dwyer 2013; McCall 2001).

[SUGGESTED PLACEMENT OF FIGURE 2]

Figure 2 summarizes the processes we have mentioned above. At the macro-dimension, federal regulation constitutes an influential material process, and ideal-worker norms exemplify a pervasive cultural factor at the site of the workplace. At the interactional-dimension, stereotypes and patterns in interpersonal interactions are infused with cultural meanings that reproduce gender, while the numerical representation of women and men in an occupation or firm has a real material effect on the promotion of equity outcomes at work. Finally, at the individual-dimension we find that culture plays an influential role in the formation of preferences that guide people into certain careers. As a material factor, we have documented how the options available to women and the degree to which they are affected by gender inequality is conditioned by whether or not they have the credential of a college degree.

GENDER CHANGE AND STABILITY IN THE FAMILY
Another terrain where gender is contested is in the family, where we see signs of progress and also remaining inequality. In 1965, women did nearly all the housework in heterosexual marriages, clocking in an average of 31.9 hours per week compared to men’s 4.4 hours. By 2011, however, these number have converged substantially, with men performing an average of 9.8 hours and women 17.8 hours per week in housework. Another shift toward gender equality has taken place with regards to childcare. In 1965 women put in four times as many hours (10.6 per week) toward childcare as men (2.6 per week), while by 2011 women are doing slightly less than twice as many hours, completing an average of 14.3 hours of childcare per week compared to men’s 7.2 (Parker and Wang 2013).

Changing time use patterns between men and women show that gender relations have improved in the family, but have not yet achieved equality. Research by Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny (2011) has found that men’s housework tends to be concentrated in do-it-yourself projects while women continue to do the routine domestic work of cooking and cleaning. Studies also find that the time fathers spend with their children is more likely to be in recreational activities and in the presence of the mother, while mother’s childcare tends to be performed solo and consists more of day-to-day caregiving duties such as hygiene, packing/providing meals, and physical care (Craig 2006; Fuligini and Brooks-Gunn 2004; Rehel 2014). Despite the persistence of inequality in the family, there has been meaningful change. Women’s increased opportunities in the labor force coupled with growing public sentiment towards greater involvement of fathers and husbands in childcare/housework has helped propel the slow progress towards equality in the family (Sullivan, forthcoming).

To understand processes of gender change and gender inequality in the family, it can be beneficial to think about the cultural and material processes that take place at the multiple
dimensions of the gender structure. Parental leave policies constitute a material possibility at the macro level of the gender structure that has been shown to have a longstanding impact on divisions of childcare duties within heterosexual couples (Esping Anderson 2009). Domestic duties tend to be more uneven, with mothers performing more housework and childcare than fathers, when mothers have taken an extended parental leave of at least one year (Hook 2006, 2010). The availability and use of parental leave for fathers, on the other hand, is associated with more egalitarian domestic practices in the long run (Hook 2006, 2010; Rehel 2014).

In addition to parental leave policies, macro-level economic changes have also impacted family dynamics. Documenting changes in family structures and the American economy since the late 19th century, Cherlin (2014) has shown how working class women are increasingly vulnerable during times of de-industrialization. The loss of manufacturing jobs since the 1980s has coincided with a decline of marriage and an increase in single motherhood among the working class – leaving these mothers alone to care for their children and maintain an income in a precarious economic climate (Cherlin 2014; Ruggles 2015). The increased rate of single motherhood in modern times, particularly among the working class, is one of the greatest challenges facing women today (see McLanahan and Percheski 2008 for a review on this topic).

Cultural processes at the macro dimension also play a large part in shaping gendered patterns of domestic labor. Sharon Hays’s (1996) work has been particularly influential by highlighting the cultural expectations mothers face to devote immense amounts of time, energy, and money into the rearing of their children. Hays documented how the cultural pressures around devoted motherhood wedge mothers between stressful careers and demanding family needs, forcing a choice between exhaustion and quitting their jobs. More recent research indicates that the culture of intensive mothering has persisted, and may even be getting worse – especially
among the middle and upper classes (Lareau 2003, see Taylor 2011 for a review). While high expectations for investments of emotional labor and care remain, recent research has found that intensive mothering ideals are now being extended to childbirth and breastfeeding – where standards around how to deliver a baby and subsequent breastfeeding practices are used to identify “good mothers” and obscure the natural variation around healthy delivery and infancy (Faircloth 2013). The intense pressure mothers face to fulfill normative parenting ideals results in major stress, not only in their work-life, but also in overall levels of happiness, physical wellbeing, and life satisfaction (Musick, Meier, and Flood 2016).

A great deal of attention by gender scholars has been devoted to exploring family gender dynamics at the interactional dimension of the gender structure. Some have argued that an analysis of housework within the family can provide a window into gender power dynamics – since no one really wants to do housework, those with less power will end up doing more of it (Davis and Greenstein 2013; Shelton and John 1996; Sullivan 2013). Power, in this case, can be conceptualized materially or culturally. Gupta (2007) and Sullivan and Gershuny (2016), for example, has found that when women earn high incomes, their husbands usually contribute more to domestic responsibilities. Another way to conceptualize power is to consider the way it is rooted in cultural notions of gender that guide behavior and perceptions. A great deal of research has examined the way certain domestic tasks are expected to be performed by women while others are done by men. Routine tasks like cleaning, childcare, and cooking are usually seen as feminine and expected to be done by women, while the irregular jobs of lawn care and repair projects are seen as men’s contributions (Bianchi et al. 2006; Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011). Clearly, routine housework and childcare done by women takes much more time and energy than the sporadic tasks undertaken by men. Such inequalities can put quite a strain on
marriages, causing some couples to split or others to adopt “family myths” that equate such incommensurable tasks like cleaning the house and walking the dog in order to maintain peace between exhausted women and avoidant men (Hochschild 1989). On the other hand, couples with more equal divisions of labor have higher levels of satisfaction with multiple aspects of their marriage (Barstad 2014; Maas et al. 2015)

Individual personalities and resources also play a part in the division of household labor. Women whose identity is based on their status as mothers can be overly controlling parents, acting as gatekeepers and preventing their male partners from becoming equal participants in parenting (Gaunt and Scott 2014). Examining the effect of material processes, previous research has found that fathers who identify with their careers – those working long hours and earning high incomes, perform far less childcare than fathers who are less closely aligned with their job (Gaunt 2006; Hook and Wolfe 2012). Finally, educational attainment is strongly associated with egalitarian divisions of household labor (Coltrane 2000), with highly educated mothers and fathers putting in significant amounts of time in childcare (Ramey and Ramey 2010).

[SUGGESTED PLACEMENT OF FIGURE 3]

A summary of the gendered processes affecting patterns of inequality in the family is illustrated in Figure 3. At the macro dimension of the gender structure, use of parental leave policies by mothers and fathers have a longstanding impact on patterns of childcare. Culturally, expectations of intensive mothering, which have only increased in recent years, continue to place a disproportionate burden and responsibility for parenting on mothers rather than fathers. At the interactional dimension of the gender structure, norms around what types of household tasks are appropriate for men and women result in women doing more time-intensive and regular chores than men. Disparities in pay/economic resources between wives and husbands also contribute to
inequalities in household labor. At the individual dimension of the gender structure, we find that women who strongly identify as mothers feel personally responsible for the day-to-day care of their children. Fathers who identify with their career and hold prestigious well-paying jobs, on the other hand, are less likely to define childcare and housework duties as a personal responsibility.

Our review of gender inequality in the labor force and in the family highlights both increasing trends toward gender equality and also the persistence of inequality as the form of stratification adapts over time and in changing social/economic conditions. Whether gender change occurs through shifts in degree (as in shrinking gaps in childcare or wages) or by changes in form (such as vertical to horizontal segregation), gender as a structure continues to play a prominent role in society. The dimensions of the gender structure divide resources, opportunities, and rewards differently between women and men. Much is stable, but much has also changed so that now cracks are beginning to show in the structure.

GENDER CHANGE AND STABILITY IN IDENTITY

One development we believe poses a very strong threat to the gender structure is the increasing visibility and voice of genderqueer, gender nonconforming, transgender, and other individuals who reject the essentialist biological distinctions of women and men. These individuals intentionally “fall through the cracks” in the gender structure. Often, their dress and appearance do not readily allow others to categorize them as either a woman or a man. Sometimes their presentation of self is discordant with the sex they had been assigned at birth. They are, as Judith Butler argues, unintelligible to others who consciously or unconsciously categorize people by their gender (2004).
While the discourse around genderqueer and transgender issues has focused primarily on identities, the recent visibility of this group and its political significance affects each level of the gender structure. At the macro-level, controversies around “bathroom bills” have generated tremendous visibility for the challenges that trans and gender nonconforming people face. These bills, like House Bill 2 in North Carolina that was passed in 2016, make it unlawful for transgender and gender nonconforming people to use bathrooms that match their gender identity, making them vulnerable to harassment when they use the restroom. The passing of “bathroom bills” generated tremendous resistance from human rights groups. Several major organizations and companies also pulled their business from North Carolina to express disagreement with the legislation. These expressions of protest have had an effect, with the incumbent governor of North Carolina losing his re-election bid in 2016 to an opponent who has promised to repeal the discriminatory elements of HB 2. As of 2017, the North Carolina legislature has repealed the sections of HB 2 that targeted trans and gender-nonconforming people. While protecting the liberties of trans and genderqueer individuals was the primary concern of organizations who successfully resisted the legislation, the controversy around “bathroom bills” also brought attention to the very meaning of gender as a binary. Questions are now being debated about the purpose of gender segregated restrooms in the first place and, even, the need for the gender binary itself. The political battle around restrooms constitutes one area where gender boundaries are being contested, with legislation like HB 2 in North Carolina reaffirming strict gender boundaries while efforts to protect the rights of transgender people can sometimes call into question the stability of gender as a binary and the purpose of institutionalized gender segregation in washrooms.
At the interactional level of the gender structure, research on trans and genderqueer individuals has highlighted the tremendous challenges they face as well as the way they make use of community to organize and to raise political consciousness. Gender policing (Pascoe 2007) refers to the everyday sanctioning of gender nonconforming presentation and behavior. Despite the increasing visibility of genderqueer and trans individuals, they continue to face harassment, marginalization, and even violence from others who feel uncomfortable about those who redefine gender boundaries (Scherrer and Pfeffer 2016; Risman, forthcoming). In interviews with youth who challenge the gender binary through self-presentation and identity, Risman (forthcoming) recounts heart-breaking stories of the social isolation and harassment genderqueer and trans youth experience as a result of having a different gender identity than what is normatively accepted. Indeed, those who redefine gender by identifying as trans or genderqueer face discrimination in multiple areas of their life (Harrison, Grant, and Herman 2012). Yet, these individuals are by no means passive victims. They organize in university LGBTQ resource centers, social communities, and activist groups where they find a great deal of support, affirmation of their identity, and collectively organize to influence social issues (Pfeffer 2014; Risman, forthcoming). Even transgender individuals who remain situated within the gender binary after transitioning – identifying as either a woman or a man –challenge patterns of inequality by virtue of their having experienced life as both a woman and a man. Schilt (2006; Schilt and Connell 2007), for example, found that transmen were much more aware of gender inequality and the privileges they experience at work after transitioning.

At the individual level, the way people gender identify has changed significantly. Individuals, particularly those who identify as genderqueer or transgender, are frequently rejecting biological criteria as a basis of gender identification. Some argue that gender
identifications are socially constructed, while others feel that one’s gender is derived from an inner self. Brubaker (2016) calls this re-definition of gender identity the “objectivity of subjective identity”. While no longer hinged to sex assigned at birth, many continue to hold gender identities that fit squarely into the gender binary. Yet, not all individuals feel this way about their identity. Some openly reject any type of gender categorization. Risman (forthcoming) has found that some transgender Millennials who identify as men or women present themselves in androgynous ways not easily labelled as masculine or feminine, very much like genderqueer Millennials who openly criticize the social insistence on having to identify as either a woman or a man. These individuals move beyond the gender binary, exposing the arbitrary social distinctions of gender and choosing identities that openly reject them.

Figure 4 summarizes the processes we have highlighted above that take place at multiple dimensions of the gender structure and shape current discourse around gender identities. At the macro-level, state legislation, such as North Carolina’s HB 2, directly affected the human rights of trans and gender-nonconforming individuals by restricting their liberties. Resistance to these bills, however, has increased the visibility of transgender rights and stimulated public debate about the gender binary. Interactionally, the regular experience of gender policing and harassment that trans and gender nonconforming youth endure constitutes a daily reality of the violence of gender. Yet, these individuals also organize in supportive communities that not only offer a safe space but also mobilize to challenge oppressive structures of gender. At the individual level, individuals make use of existing cultural discourse in the formation (or rejection) of gender identity claims.

[SUGGESTED PLACEMENT OF FIGURE 4]

CONCLUSION: GENDER CONTESTATION IN UNCERTAIN TIMES
While we have seen improvements in gender equality over the past several decades, continued progress is not inevitable. Given the current political climate, it is quite possible that inequality may even get worse in the near future. When we started this manuscript in the summer of 2016, we were optimistic about the future of a female president in the U.S. In fact, the first draft of this manuscript concluded with a confident statement about the future of women. Yet, the election of Donald Trump was a difficult reminder to us that forces of gender inequality remain quite strong. Not only does our current president oppose any policy aimed at improving gender equality, but he frequently makes disparaging remarks towards women that only reinforce ideologies of male privilege. At the same time, however, Trump’s election has motivated more people than ever before to get involved in feminist activism. On January 21, the day after Trump’s Inauguration, between 3 and 6 million people participated in women’s marches across the U.S. in a sign of opposition to Trump and support for human rights (Waddell 2017). This was the largest protest in U.S. history, and indicates that despite Trump’s election, there remains a very strong movement for gender equality and human rights more generally.

In this era of uncertainty, gender structure theory can help us make sense of the ways gender inequality is challenged and/or reproduced. Material and cultural processes operating at the individual, interactional, and macro levels of society have dynamic and contradictory effects. Some processes improve equality, while other make it worse. The increasing visibility of genderqueer and transgender issues is one opportunity where we can observe cracks in the gender structure. Yet, recent political shifts indicate that strides towards gender equality will be met with strong reaction from those with a stake in maintaining men’s advantage over women. Moving forward, it is important to remember that progress towards gender equality takes place on contested terrain. By conceptualizing processes of inequality with gender structure theory, we
can be better positioned to identify the opportunities for progressive change and the areas where we will see resistance.

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758.
FIGURES:

Figure 1: Gender as a Social Structure

Gender as a Social Structure

Individual-Dimension
- Gendered Identities and worldviews
- Gendered Bodies

Interactional-Dimension
- Stereotypes and Expectations
- Performance of Gendered Behavior
- Material Inequalities

Macro-Dimension
- Organizational Structures with Gendered Implications
- Widespread Cultural Notions of Gender

Adapted From Risman and Davis (2013: 745)
Figure 2: Gender as a Social Structure in the Realm of Paid Labor

Gendered Patterns in Paid Labor

Individual-Dimension
- Occupational/Career Preferences
- College Degree and Education

Interactional-Dimension
- Gendered Stereotypes and Patterns of Interaction
- Numerical Representation of Men and Women

Macro-Dimension
- Federal Regulation, EEOC, Title VII, Title IX
- Ideal Worker Norms
Figure 3: Gender as a Social Structure in the Family

Gendered Patterns in the Family

Individual-Dimension
- Identity as mother/father
- Feelings of responsibility for children's care
- Employment/commitment to job

Interactional-Dimension
- Expectations for household tasks
- Expectations for childcare by spouses, teachers, and community

Macro-Dimension
- Parental leave for mothers and fathers
- Cultural expectations of intensive mothering
- Disparities in pay
Figure 4: Gender as a Social Structure in Identity/Fluidity

Gender Identity / Fluidity

Individual-Dimension
- Use of cultural discourse to make or reject identity claims

Interactional-Dimension
- Gender policing of non-conformity
- Organizing with community for support and political mobilization

Macro-Dimension
- Legislation dealing with transgender rights (i.e. HB 2 in North Carolina)
- Increased public debate on gender binary