

Sex and Gender: Conceptual Confusions

Barbara J. Risman
Professor and Head
Department of Sociology
University of Illinois at Chicago
brisman@uic.edu

Georgiann Davis
PhD Candidate
Department of Sociology
University of Illinois at Chicago
gdavis4@uic.edu

Epistemology and The Production of Knowledge



■ Positivism

- Value neutrality
- Objectivity: Data as Fact

■ Post Modernism

- Science as socially constructive
- Cultural Relativism

■ Standpoint Theory: Feminist Analysis

- Objectivity
- Knower is socially constructed
- Social location privileges kinds of knowledge
- Variety of standpoints increases quality of knowledge

Operational Definitions

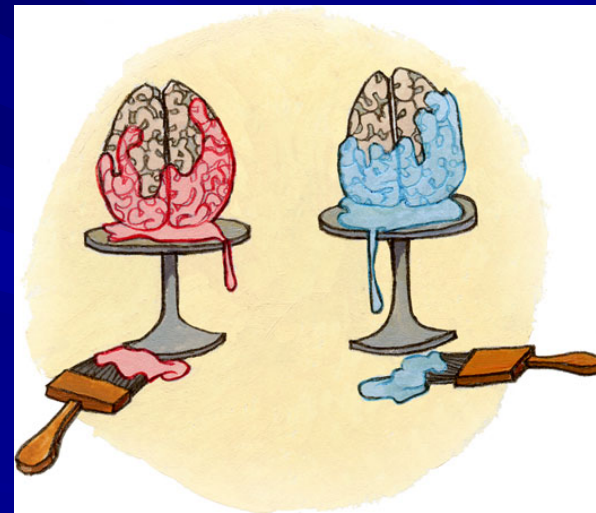
■ Sex as Biological

- Genitalia
- Sex Chromosomes
- Hormones
 - Life Stage
- Blurring the Binary



■ Gender as Social Construct

- Brain Sex ???
- Socialization
- Expectations
- Structural Position
- Context Specific
- Stratification



- Even the Body (e.g. sex as biology) is experienced socially

A just future would be one without gender and its social structure and practices; one's sex would have no more relevance than one's eye color or the length of one's toes

-Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*

We live in a world shaped by the collective failure of our forebears to abolish gender inequities. The corollary is that our children may also live in such a world

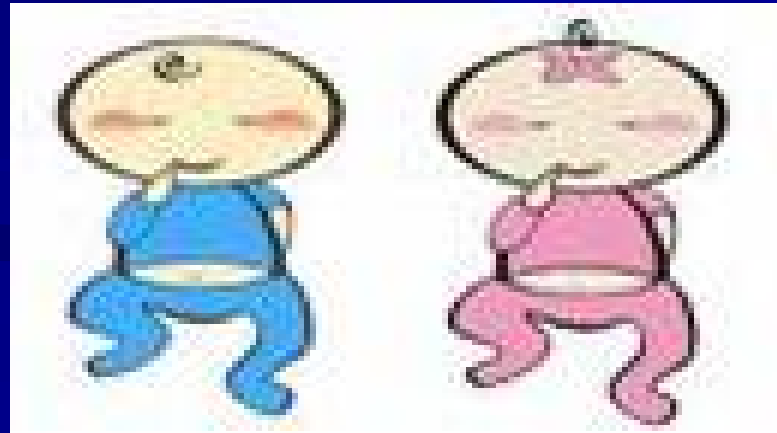
-R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power*

The prime paradox of gender is that in order to dismantle the institution you must first make it very visible

-Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender*

Theory and Measurement

- **Attention to Sex & Gender**
- **The “discovery” of Sex Roles (1950’s - 1970’s)**
 - **Functional**
 - **Parson & Bales**
 - **Zelditch**
 - **Socialization: The Pinks & the Blues**
 - **Jean Stockard**



Theory and Measurement

- **Measurement**
 - Unidimensional
 - Bipolar and opposites

Masculinity ————— **Femininity**



Measurement Leads to Theoretical Developments

■ Bem Sex Role Inventory

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never or almost never true	Usually not true	Sometimes but infrequently true	Occasionally true	Often true	Usually true	Always or almost always true

1. love children	_____	3. conscientious	_____
2. defend my own beliefs	_____	4. unsystematic	_____

Measurement Leads to Theoretical Developments

- **Bem Sex Role Inventory**
 - Unidimensional Fails.....Orthogonal

	Masculinity	Femininity
Female	A	B
Male	C	D

Measurement Leads to Theoretical Developments

- Masculinity and Femininity Independent Measures

Femininity

Low ————— High

Masculinity

Low ————— High

- Distinct from Biological Bodies

Post-Sex Roles Theoretical Developments: New Structuralism

- **Bielby, Gerson, Risman (1970s & 1980s)**
 - **Opportunities/Constraints Versus “Choice”**
 - **Deceptive Distinctions-**
 - **Can Men Mother?**
 - **Women’s Hard Choice**
 - **Gender Disappears when Men and Women in Same Role**



Testing Structural Hypotheses Complicating the Story

- The Glass Escalator**
- Division of Household Labor Research**

Doing Gender

- **West & Zimmerman (1987)**
- **Butler (1990, 2004)**
- **Williams (2000)**
 - We are what we “do”
 - **Performativity**
 - **Conform or not- always attend to it**
 - **Moral Character**

- **Maternal Wall: Workers have no Caretaking Responsibilities**
 - **Ethical or Practical**

Intersectionality

- **From Margin to Center**
 - Patricia Hill Collins (1990)
 - Dorothy Smith (1987)
 - Kimberly Crenshaw (1989)
- **Variation in Masculinities and Femininities**
 - Race
 - Ethnicity
 - Class
 - Sexuality
 - Nation-state
 - Religion, etc.

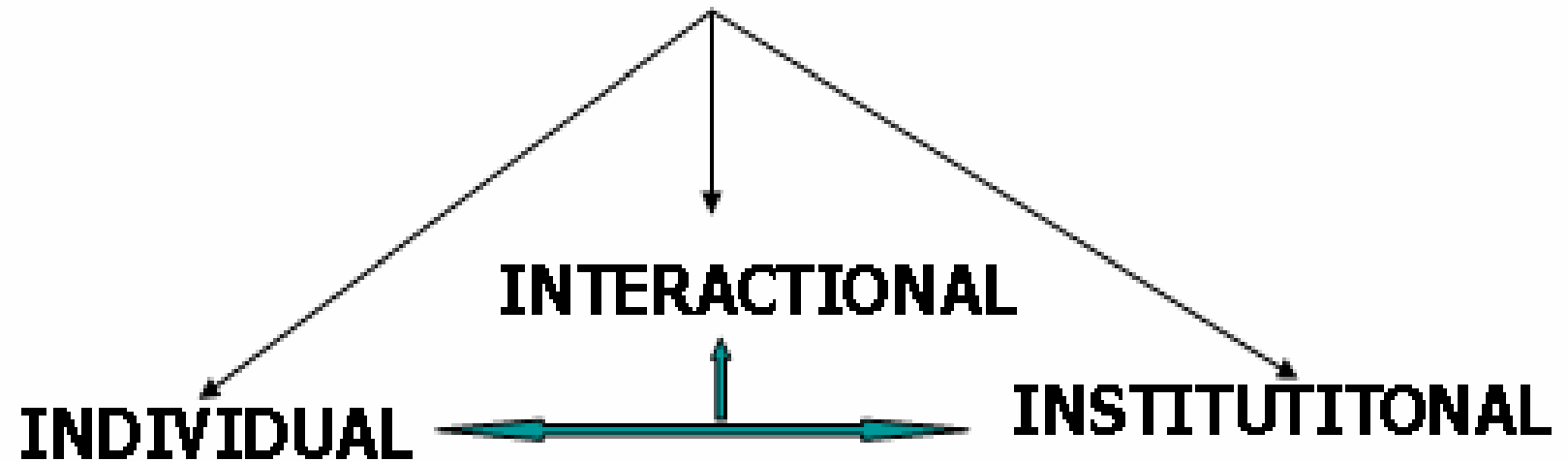


Multi-Level Stratification Theories

- Sex/Gender Order
 - Connell (1987)
- Gender as an Institution
 - Lorber (1994)
 - Martin (2004)
- Gender as a Social Structure
 - Risman (1998, 2004)



Gender as Social Structure



Gender Structure Theory

TABLE 1: Dimensions of Gender Structure, by Illustrative Social Processes

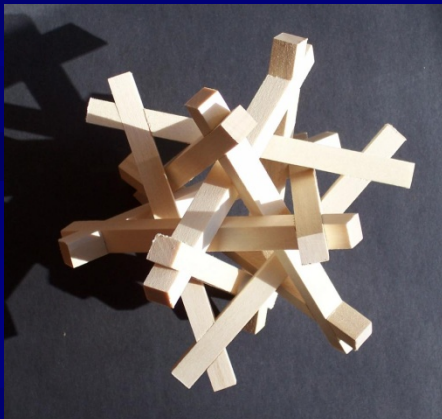
	<i>Dimensions of the Gender Structure</i>		
	<i>Individual Level</i>	<i>Interactional Cultural Expectations</i>	<i>Institutional Domain</i>
Social Processes ^a	Socialization Internalization Identity work Construction of selves	Status expectations Cognitive bias Othering Trading power for patronage Altercasting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

a. These 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.

Risman Barbara, 2004. "Gender as a Social Structure: Theory Wrestling with Activism," *Gender & Society* Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 429 – 450.

Advantages of Gender Structure Theory

1. **Conceptual organization scheme for field**
(or order for a jigsaw puzzle of findings)
2. **Beyond a warfare model of science**
Model building versus grand theory-testing
3. **Multi-directional causation between levels**
Research questions- re context



Applications of Gender Structure Theory to Medical Research

■ Social Context

- Racial Differences in Heart Disease
(LeClere et. al 1998)**
- Gender Expression and Symptoms
(Phillips 2005)**
- Coronary Disease and Masculinity
(Hunt et. al 2007)**
- Stress, Mental Well-Being, Sexual
Abuse and Irritable Bowel Syndrome
(S. Payne 2004)**

Applications of Gender Structure to Medical Research

■ Individual level

- Development of the gendered self and expression of pain, symptoms
 - Masculinity and diagnoses (Hunt et. al 2007)
 - Masculinity and IBS (S. Payne 2004)

■ Interactional level

- Patients *expected* to appear with gender specific symptoms
 - Heart disease in men verse women (Phillips 2005)

■ Institutional level

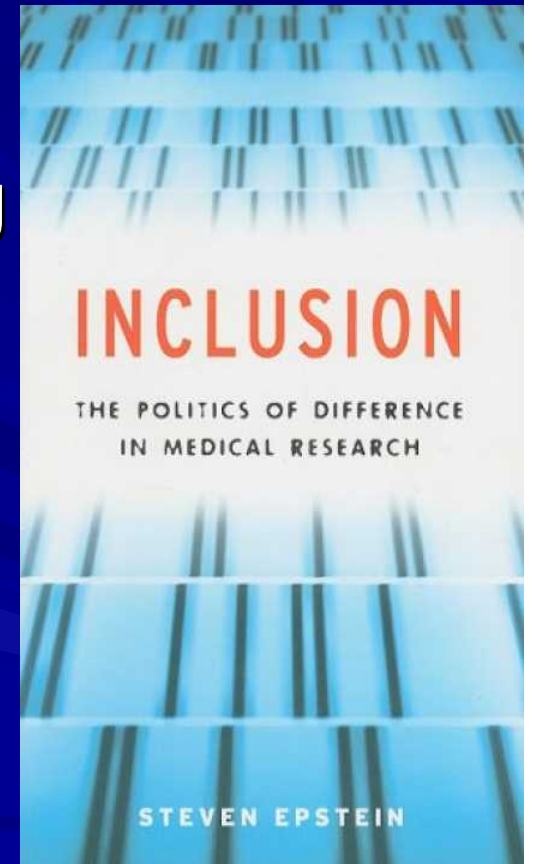
- Insurance regulations and preventative care
 - Trans men and mammography, pap smears, etc. (Bockting and Goldberg 2007)
 - Intersex patients and access to hormones post gonadectomy

Gender Structure and Medical Research

- **Reification of Sex as Causal Category**
 - Inclusion and the Politics of Difference in Medical Research (Epstein, 2007)
- **Policing Bodies into Genders**
 - Making Gender out of Sex
 - Medical Treatment of Intersex/DSD
 - Transgender /Queering of America

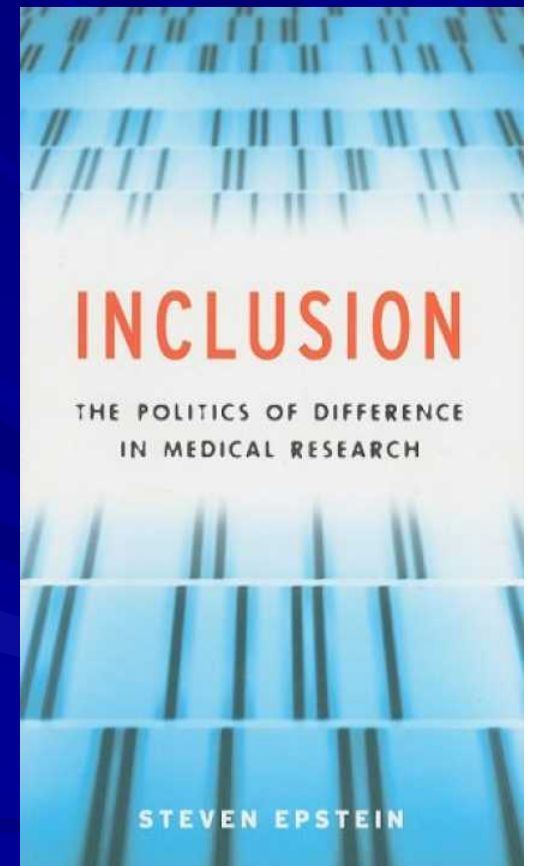
Inclusion and the Politics of Difference in Medical Research

- **“Sex profiling” as Problem**
 - Defined as the process of seeking gender inclusion in medical research
 - Such perpetuates the belief that gender differences are biological
 - Positions medical researchers to ignore difference within genders



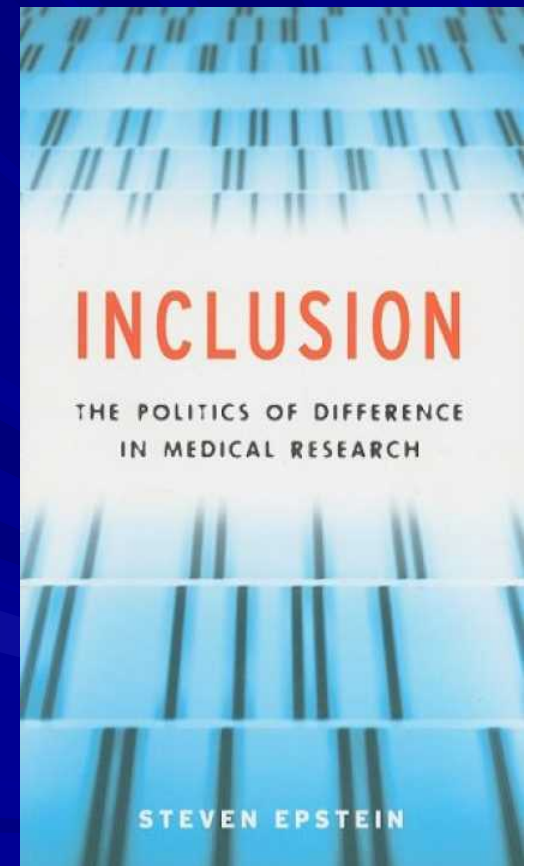
Inclusion and the Politics of Difference in Medical Research

- **“Dubious Associations” between sex/gender and medical outcomes**
 - **Methodological Weakness in Health Research**
 - **Correlation is not Causation**
 - **“NIH and FDA policing calling for subgroup comparisons may inadvertently promote the generation of spurious findings” (251)**



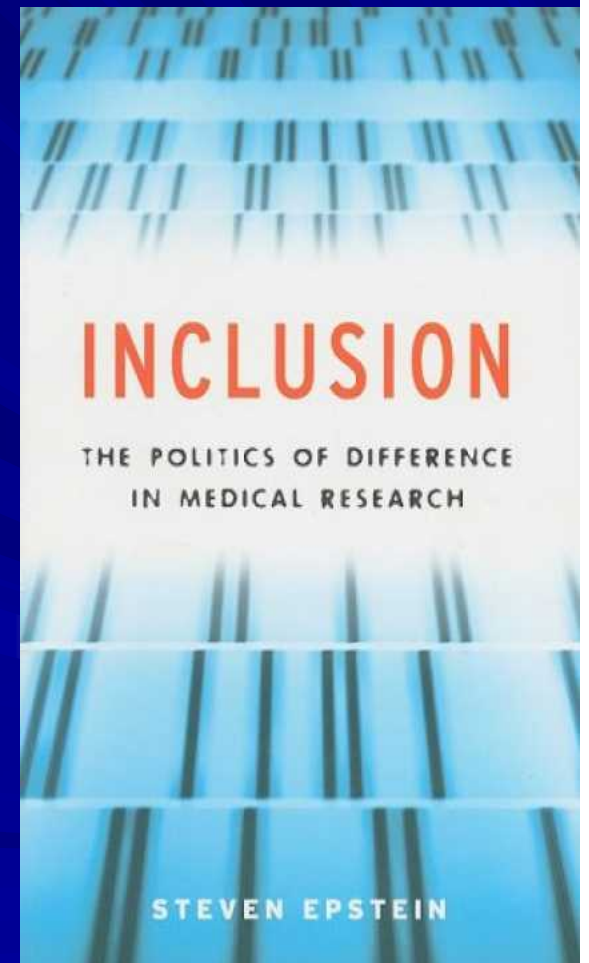
Inclusion and the Politics of Difference in Medical Research

- “By emphasizing the biology of difference, [such practices] encourage the belief that qualities such as race and gender...are best remedied by attending to those biological particularities” (11)



Inclusion and the Politics of Difference in Medical Research

- **Gender Stereotypes and Implications for Medical Treatment**
 - Potential for misdiagnosis if a patient doesn't adhere to the stereotype that pertains to his or her group when describing symptoms (e.g., heart patients always present with chest pain)



Thank you

Barbara J. Risan
Professor and Head
Department of Sociology
University of Illinois at Chicago
brisman@uic.edu

Georgiann Davis
PhD Candidate
Department of Sociology
University of Illinois at Chicago
gdavis4@uic.edu