

FRAMED BEFORE WE KNOW IT

How Gender Shapes Social Relations

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In this article, I argue that gender is a primary cultural frame for coordinating behavior and organizing social relations. I describe the implications for understanding how gender shapes social behavior and organizational structures. By my analysis, gender typically acts as a background identity that biases, in gendered directions, the performance of behaviors undertaken in the name of organizational roles and identities. I develop an account of how the background effects of the gender frame on behavior vary by the context that different organizational and institutional structures set but can also infuse gendered meanings into organizational practices. Next, I apply this account to two empirical illustrations to demonstrate that we cannot understand the shape that the structure of gender inequality and gender difference takes in particular institutional or societal contexts without taking into account the background effects of the gender frame on behavior in these contexts.

Keywords: *gender inequality; social interaction; culture; institutions; stereotypes*

During the past decade, I have made the case that gender is one of our culture's two or three primary frames for organizing social relations (Ridgeway 1997, 2007). I have also argued that unless we take into account how gender frames social relations, we cannot understand how the gendered structure of contemporary society both changes and resists changing. My purpose here is to spell out this argument in more specific detail. I first explain what I mean by gender as a "primary frame" and describe some of the implications of this approach. Second, and just as important, I explain why I believe we must incorporate the effects of gender as a primary frame into our analyses of the gendered structure of society. To do this, I offer two empirical illustrations that demonstrate that we cannot understand the shape the gender structure takes in particular situations without taking into account the background effects of the gender frame on behavior. In the first illustration, I show how the gender

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frame causes the same organizational logic to have rather different implications for gender inequality in two different types of innovative high-tech firms. In the second illustration, I draw on research that shows how the background effects of the gender frame help us understand why some of the societies that have gone farthest in reducing gender inequality nevertheless have some of the most gender-segregated occupational structures in the advanced industrial world (Charles and Bradley 2009).

In discussing the question of “why it matters” whether we incorporate the effects of the gender frame into our analyses, I also wish to address an unresolved tension among feminist scholars in how best to approach the gendered structure of society. In 1987, West and Zimmerman shook up the world of gender theorizing in sociology with their groundbreaking analysis of gender as a social interactional accomplishment, a performance of difference that one “does” rather than “is” (Fenstermaker and West 2002; West and Zimmerman 1987). This “doing gender, doing difference” perspective continues to wield persuasive power, as attested by the rate at which it is cited. Yet, this micro-interactional account of gender has, in some ways, remained an undigested nugget.

As sociologists, most of us are structuralists who see gender and race inequality as rooted in broad organizational and institutional structures with strong material bases. Many feel a theoretical tension between micro-interactional approaches, evocative as they may be, and more structuralist explanatory leanings. There are lingering questions about how to fit the micro-interactional account into institutional structure and how much weight to give the micro account. Micro accounts are appealing and add richness to our understanding, but do they really matter?

Another major innovation in gender theorizing in sociology has partially assuaged this theoretical tension. This is the recognition that gender is a multilevel structure, system, or institution of social practices that involves mutually reinforcing processes at the macro-structural/institutional level, the interactional level, and the individual level (Acker 1990; Lorber 1994; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Risman 1998, 2004). The remaining difficulty, however, is to explicate how these multilevel processes affect one another, beyond simply saying that they generally but not always reinforce one another.

My argument that gender is a primary frame for social relations is at root a micro-interactional approach that owes much to the “doing gender” account, even though my argument is a bit different in emphasis. To make the case that the gender frame matters, I will focus on the interface of the micro-interactional and the institutional and structural levels of analysis.

My intent is to shed more light on how these multilevel processes work together to shape the gender structures that emerge. In doing so, I hope to contribute toward resolution of the tension between micro-interactional and structural-level explanations.

GENDER AS A PRIMARY FRAME

What does it mean to say that gender is a primary cultural frame for organizing social relations (Ridgeway 1997, 2006, 2007)? As we know, people depend on social relations with others to attain most of what they want and need in life. Social relations pose a well-known problem, however. To relate to another to accomplish a valued goal, we have to find some way to coordinate our behavior with that other. Classic sociologists such as Goffman (1967) and contemporary game theorists (Chwe 2001) have arrived at the same conclusion about what it takes to solve this coordination problem. For you and me to coordinate effectively, we need shared, “common” knowledge to use as a basis for our joint actions. Common knowledge is cultural knowledge that we all assume we all know. I have argued that actually, we need a particular type of common, cultural knowledge (Ridgeway 2007). We need a shared way of categorizing and defining “who” self and other are in the situation so that we can anticipate how each of us is likely to act and coordinate our actions accordingly.

Coordination and Difference

Systems for categorizing and defining things are based on contrast, and therefore, difference. Something is this because it is different from that. Defining *self* and *other* to relate focuses us on finding shared principles of social difference that we can use to categorize and make sense of one another. The coordination problem inherent to organizing social relations drives populations of people who must regularly relate to one another to develop shared social-category systems based on culturally defined standards of difference.

To manage social relations in real time, some of these cultural-category systems must be so simplified that they can be quickly applied as framing devices to virtually anyone to start the process of defining *self* and *other* in the situation. In fact, studies of social cognition suggest that a very small number of such cultural-difference systems, about three or so, serve as the primary categories of person perception in a society (Brewer and Lui 1989; Fiske 1998). These primary categories define the things a person

in that society must know about someone to render that someone sufficiently meaningful to relate to him or her.

Sex/gender, of course, is a form of human variation that is highly susceptible to cultural generalization as a primary category for framing social relations (Ridgeway 2006, 2007). It yields a cultural-difference system that is relevant to sexuality and reproduction and that delineates a line of difference among people who must regularly cooperate with one another. Thus, the male–female distinction is virtually always one of a society’s primary cultural-category systems (Glick and Fiske 1999). In the United States, race and age are also primary categories (see Schneider 2004, 96).

Social-cognition studies show that in fact, we automatically and nearly instantly sex categorize any specific person to whom we attempt to relate (Ito and Urland 2003; Stangor et al. 1992). We do this not just in person but also over the Internet and even imaginatively, as we examine a person’s resume or think about the kind of person we would like to hire. Studies show that Americans categorize others they encounter on Black or white race almost instantly as well (Ito and Urland 2003). When we categorize another, we by comparison implicitly make salient our own sex and race categorization as well.

We so instantly sex-categorize others that our subsequent categorizations of them as, say, bosses or coworkers are nested in our prior understandings of them as male or female and take on slightly different meanings as a result (Brewer and Lui 1989; Fiske 1998). This initial framing by sex never quite disappears from our understanding of them or ourselves in relation to them. Thus, we frame and are framed by gender literally before we know it. Importantly, however, the extent to which this preframing by gender shapes what happens in a specific situation depends greatly on what else is going on in that situation. As we will see, this is a point at which the gender frame interacts with institutional context. But first, I need to say more about how the gender frame coordinates behavior.

Cultural Beliefs about Gender

Primary categories of person perception, including sex category, work as cultural frames for coordinating behavior by associating category membership with widely shared cultural beliefs about how people in one category are likely to behave compared to those in a contrasting category. These cultural beliefs are shared stereotypes, as in “men are from Mars and women are from Venus.” Gender stereotypes are our beliefs about how “most people” view the typical man or woman (Eagly and Karau 2002; Fiske 1998; Fiske et al. 2002). We all know these stereotypes as cultural

knowledge, whether or not we personally endorse them. But the point is, because we think “most people” hold these beliefs, we expect others to judge us according to them. As a result, we must take these beliefs into account in our own behavior even if we do not endorse them. In this way, these shared cultural beliefs act as the “rules” for coordinating public behavior on the basis of gender (Ridgeway and Correll 2004).

The use of sex or gender as a primary cultural frame for defining *self* and *other* drives the content of gender stereotypes to focus on presumed gender differences. *Difference* need not logically imply inequality. Yet, among groups of people who must regularly deal with one another, difference is easily transformed into inequality through any of a variety of social processes (Ridgeway 2006). Once inequality is established between groups of people, however, it will reshape the nature of the differences that are culturally perceived as characteristic of the higher and lower status groups (Fiske et al. 2002; Jackman 1994). The content of our gender stereotypes shows the characteristic pattern of status inequality in which the higher status group is perceived as more proactive and agentically competent (“from Mars”) and the lower status group is seen as more reactive and emotionally expressive (“from Venus”; Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996; Glick and Fiske 1999; Wagner and Berger 1997). Thus, difference and inequality codetermine each other in our shared gender beliefs, and coordination on the basis of them produces social relations of inequality as well as difference (Wagner and Berger 1997).

The social importance of gender as a primary frame for making sense of *self* and *other* and the cultural definition of this frame as a difference that implies inequality create two distinct sets of interests for individuals. These interests affect the extent to which individuals actively gender their behavior. As a belief system that privileges men over women, it gives most men and some women who benefit from male dominance an interest in enacting and maintaining that system. In addition, as a fundamental category for understanding the self, it gives almost all women and men a sometimes powerful interest in enacting essentialist expressions of gender difference. Both types of interests can have consequences for the actions individuals take when the constraining social structures around them give them the space to act on their own.

Hegemonic and Alternative Gender Beliefs

The familiar, widely known gender stereotypes that I have called the rules of gender are not just individual beliefs. They are culturally *hegemonic* beliefs for two reasons. First, these beliefs are institutionalized in media

representations, in the images of men and women implied by laws and government policies, and in a wide variety of taken-for-granted organizational practices. Second, the content of these gender beliefs, while they purport to be universal depictions of the sexes, in fact represent most closely the experiences and understandings of gender by dominant groups in society—those who most powerfully shape our institutions. The men and women we see in gender stereotypes look most like white, middle-class heterosexuals. Yet, as Shelley Correll and I have argued, in public places and with strangers, these hegemonic cultural beliefs about gender act as the default rules of gender (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). This makes the public enactment of gender that much more complicated for those who are not white, middle-class heterosexuals.

Although we all know hegemonic gender beliefs, many of us also hold alternative beliefs about gender that we share with a subgroup of similarly minded others—fellow feminists, a racial or ethnic group, or an immigrant group. Some evidence suggests that these alternative cultural beliefs about gender, rather than the hegemonic ones, shape our behavior and judgments most clearly when we are relating to others we believe share those beliefs (Filardo 1996; Milkie 1999). This makes sense if we are using these beliefs to coordinate our behavior with those others. It remains for future research to investigate the contexts in which we systematically rely on alternative gender beliefs, rather than hegemonic beliefs, to guide our behavior.

HOW DOES THE GENDER FRAME SHAPE BEHAVIOR?

Thus far, I have spoken in general terms about the gender frame and cultural beliefs that shape behavior. Exactly how does this shaping process work, however? Also, what about the fact that in any given context in which we relate to others, much more is going on than just gender? In particular, we typically act in the context of some institutional or organizational framework that suggests specific role identities and role relations. What happens to the gender frame in that context? To address these questions, I first describe how the gender frame itself shapes behavior and judgments and then turn to how it interfaces with the organizational frame within which individuals act.

Effects of the Gender Frame

Research shows that sex categorization unconsciously primes gender stereotypes in our minds and makes them cognitively available to shape

behavior and judgments (Blair and Banaji 1996; Kunda and Spencer 2003). The extent to which they actually do shape our behavior, however, can vary from negligible to substantial depending on the nature of the particular situation and our own motives or interests. What matters is the extent to which the information in gender beliefs is diagnostic for us in that it helps us figure out how to act in the situation. Research shows that some basic principles guide how this works.

When people in the situation differ in sex category, cultural beliefs about gender become effectively salient and measurably affect behaviors and judgments unless something else overrides them (see Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). Also, in either mixed or same-sex contexts, gender stereotypes implicitly shape behavior and judgments to the extent that gender is culturally defined as relevant to the situation, as, for instance, with a gender-typed task such as math (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). The effects of gender beliefs on an actor's behavior will also be greater to the extent the actor consciously or unconsciously perceives the game of gender to be relevant to his or her own motives or interests in the situation (Fiske 1998).

Pulling these arguments together, we can see that the way the gender frame brings cultural beliefs about gender to bear on our expectations for self and other, on our behavior, and on our judgments produces a distinctive pattern of effects. In mixed-sex settings in which the task or context is relatively gender neutral, cultural beliefs that men are more agentially competent and more worthy of status will advantage them over otherwise similar women, but only modestly so. In settings that are culturally typed as masculine, gender beliefs will bias judgments and behaviors more strongly in favor of men. In contexts culturally linked with women, biases will weakly favor women except for positions of authority. A wide variety of research supports this general pattern of effects (see Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999).

These effects largely describe the way the gender frame introduces implicit biases into expectations and behaviors that affect gender inequality in the setting. The enactment of inequality, however, is accomplished through the enactment of gender difference (e.g., agentic competence vs. reactive warmth) that implies and creates the inequality. The enactment of gender difference or inequality is fed by the interests the gender frame gives people in understanding themselves as appropriately gendered as well as by the way the gender frame causes them to react to and judge the behaviors of others. As institutionalized cultural "rules," gender beliefs about difference and inequality have a prescriptive edge that people enforce by sanctioning explicit violations. Women are typically sanctioned

for acting too domineering and men for being too yielding or emotionally weak (Eagly and Karau 2002; Rudman and Fairchild 2004).

Gender as a Background Identity

How, then, do these contextually varying effects of the gender frame interface with the specific organizational or institutional contexts in which our relations with others occur? People typically confront the problem of coordinating their behavior with another in the context of both a primary person frame (gender, race, and age) and an institutional frame (a family, a university, a place of work). As part of the primary person frame, the instructions for behavior encoded in gender stereotypes are exceedingly abstract and diffuse. For this very reason, they can be applied to virtually any situation, but by the same token, they do not take an actor very far in figuring out exactly how to behave.

In contrast, institutional frameworks, even vague ones such as “the family,” are much more specific. They contain defined roles and the expected relations among them. The roles that are embedded in institutional and organizational frameworks are often themselves infused with gendered cultural meanings. Indeed, one of the most powerful ways that the gender frame affects the gendered structure of society is through infusing gendered meanings into the institutional practices, procedures, and role identities by which various organizations operate. For now, however, the point is that these institutional roles, even the gendered ones, provide clearer instructions for behavior in a given context than do the diffuse cultural meanings of the primary gender frame. For individuals, it is these institutional identities and rules that are in the foreground of their sense of who they are in a given context and how they should behave there.

Gender, in contrast, is almost always a background identity for individuals. I have made this point elsewhere, but I wish to emphasize it here because it is essential to understanding how gender shapes social structure (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). As a background identity, gender typically acts to bias in gendered directions the performance of behaviors undertaken in the name of more concrete, foregrounded organizational roles or identities. Thus, gender becomes a way of acting like a doctor or of driving a car. This, of course, is what West and Zimmerman (1987) meant by “doing gender.”

The Interaction of the Gender Frame and Institutional Structure

The extent to which the gender frame flavors or biases the performance of institutional role identities depends on two general factors. The first is

the salience and relevance of the gender frame in the situation. As we can infer from above, this depends on the gender composition of the institutional context and the extent to which the activities and roles in the context are themselves culturally gendered. When organizational activities are gendered, the background gender frame becomes more powerfully relevant for actors, and the biases it introduces shape how people carry out those activities and how they fill in the details not clearly specified by institutional rules. The gendering of institutional tasks or roles, then, empowers the background gender frame in the situation to become a significant part of the process by which people enact their institutional roles. Scholars such as Patricia Martin have given us powerful illustrations of this process (Martin 2003).

A second factor that affects the impact of the gender frame is the extent to which organizational rules and procedures constrain individual discretion in judgments and behavior. The more constrained individuals' actions are, the less scope the gender frame has to implicitly shape their behavior on its own. For this reason, many scholars have recommended formal rules and procedures as devices to suppress stereotype bias and discrimination in employment (Bielby 2000; Reskin and McBrier 2000). On the other hand, feminist scholars have also long pointed out that apparently neutral formal rules and procedures can embody bias in their application or effect (e.g., Acker 1990; Nelson and Bridges 1999; Steinberg 1995).

The gender-framing perspective suggests that whether formal personnel procedures do more good than bad depends not only on the extent to which bias is built into the procedures but also on how powerfully disadvantaging the gender frame would be for women if actors were not constrained by formal procedures. Thus, there is no simple answer to the "are formal rules best" question. But a consideration of the joint effects of the gender frame and the organizational frame allows us to specify how the answer to this question varies systematically with the nature of the context. One of my empirical examples will illustrate this point.

To the extent that cultural beliefs about gender do shape behavior and social relations in an institutional context, either directly through the gender frame acting on individuals or indirectly through biased procedures, these gender beliefs will be reinscribed into new organizational procedures and rules that actors develop through their social relations in that setting (Ridgeway 1997; Ridgeway and England 2007). In this way, the gendered structure of society can be projected into the future through new organizational procedures and forms that reinvent it for a new era.

My argument suggests that the background gender frame is the primary mechanism by which material, organizational structures become organized

by gender. By the same token, these organizational structures sustain widely shared cultural beliefs about gender. To the extent that economic, technological, and political factors change these structures and the material arrangements that they create between men and women, these material changes create gradual, iterative pressure for change in cultural beliefs about gender as well.

THE EXPLANATORY IMPORTANCE OF THE GENDER FRAME

I will illustrate my abstract arguments about how the gender frame interacts with institutional structures with two empirical examples. My purpose in offering these examples is to demonstrate how we have to take into account the background effects of the gender frame to understand the gender structure that emerges in a given context from particular organizational or institutional structures.

Gender in Innovative, High-tech Firms

My first example comes from studies of the small, science-focused start-up firms that have become a leading edge of the biotechnology and information technology (IT) industries. As Kjersten Whittington and Laurel Smith-Doerr (2008; Whittington 2007) describe, many of these high-tech firms have adopted a new organizational logic called the network form. Work in these firms is organized in terms of project teams that are often jointly constructed with a network of other firms. Scientists in a firm move flexibly among these project teams, and the hierarchies of control over their activities are relatively flat.

Is this informal, flexible structure advantageous or disadvantageous for women scientists who work in these high-tech firms? Whittington and Smith-Doerr's (2008; Whittington 2007) research suggests that the answer is quite different for biotech firms based in the life sciences than it is for firms based in engineering and the physical sciences, such as IT firms. To understand why the same organizational logic plays out so differently for women scientists in one context compared to the other, we need to take into account how the background frame of gender acts in each context.

The life sciences are not strongly gender-typed in contemporary culture. Women now constitute about a third of the PhDs in the area (Smith-Doerr 2004). Applying our framing account to this situation leads us to expect that because of the mixed gender composition of the workforce in this

field, cultural beliefs about gender will be salient in biotech firms, but only diffusely so. Because the field is not strongly gender-typed, we expect these background gender beliefs to create only modest advantages for men in expected competence. Facing only modest biases, women scientists in biotech should have the basic credibility with their coworkers that they need to take effective advantage of the opportunities offered by the flexible structure of innovative firms. They should be able to press forward with their interests, work around “bad actors” if necessary, find projects that match their skills, and excel (Smith-Doerr 2004). As a result, in the biotech context, an informal, flexible organizational form could be more advantageous for women than would a more hierarchical structure.

In fact, Whittington and Smith-Doerr (2008) find women life scientists do better in these innovative biotech firms than they do in more traditionally hierarchical research organizations such as pharmaceutical firms. In comparison to more hierarchical firms, women in these flexible firms achieve more supervisory positions (Smith-Doerr 2004) and attain parity with men in the likelihood of having at least one patent to their name (Whittington and Smith-Doerr 2008). Even in these innovative firms, however, the total number of patents women acquire is less than that of comparable men, as it also is in traditional hierarchical firms. This remaining disadvantage is not surprising if we remember that background gender biases still modestly favor men, even in this innovative biotech context.

In contrast to the life sciences, engineering and the physical sciences are still strongly gender-typed in favor of men in our society. Thus, the background gender frame in the IT context is more powerfully relevant and creates stronger implicit biases against women’s competence than in biotech settings. In this situation, the informality and flexibility of the innovative firm is unlikely to be an advantage for women scientists and may even be a disadvantage. Facing strong challenges to their credibility, it will be harder for women to take effective advantage of the flexible structure. Also, in the context of a masculine-typed gender frame, the informal work structure may lead to a “boys club” atmosphere in these innovative IT firms.

Consistent with the above analysis, Whittington (2007), in her study of patenting, found that women physical scientists and engineers were no better off in small, flexible, less hierarchical firms than they were in traditional, industrial research and development firms. In both contexts, they were less likely to patent at all and had fewer patents overall than did comparable men. In another study, McIlwee and Robinson (1992) found that women engineers actually did better in a traditional, rule-structured aerospace firm than in a more informal, flexible IT start-up because in the

context of a disadvantaging background gender frame, formal rules leveled the playing field to some extent. This example suggests that we cannot understand the full implications of a particular organizational logic for the gender structure it will produce without considering how that organizational logic interacts with the background effects of the gender frame.

Sex Segregation of Field of Study in Affluent Societies

My second example comes from Maria Charles' and Karen Bradley's (2009) provocative study of how the sex-typing of fields of higher education varies across societies. The sex-segregation of fields of study such as the humanities or engineering feeds one of the most durable and consequential gender structures of industrial societies, the sex-segregation of occupations (Charles and Grusky 2004). Gender scholars often puzzle over the fact that some of the societies that have achieved the lowest levels of material inequality between men and women, such as the Scandinavian countries, nevertheless have some of the most sex-segregated occupational structures of advanced industrial societies (Charles and Grusky 2004). How does such sex-segregation persist and even flourish in the face of institutional, political, and economic processes that undermine gender inequality?

Charles and Bradley's analysis shows that we cannot answer this question from a purely economic and structural perspective. Structural factors such as the growth of the service and health sectors in postindustrial economies do contribute to the sex-segregation of jobs and fields of study (Charles and Bradley 2009; Charles and Grusky 2004). But to really explain segregation, we have to take into account how the background frame of gender interacts with cultural developments in highly affluent societies.

As Charles and Bradley (2009) note, contemporary affluent societies tend to embrace a "postmaterialist" ethic of self-expression and self-realization. In the context of wealthy societies that free most of their citizens from the fear of dire material want and that value self-expression, Charles and Bradley argue that the background gender frame powerfully influences the fields of study people pursue. If our fundamental understanding of who we are is rooted in our primary identities, including gender, then many of us will implicitly fall back on cultural beliefs about gender to frame what it means to make life choices that "express" ourselves. There will be a tendency on the part of many of us to, in Charles and Bradley's (2009) phrase, "indulge our gendered selves." In support of their argument, they find that affluent postindustrial societies have larger gaps between boys and girls in expressed affinity for math ("I like math"), controlling for boys' and girls' relative mathematical achievement. Furthermore, these culturally gendered

affinities more strongly predict the sex-segregation of higher education fields in these societies than in less-developed ones.

An irony of the structural freedoms of advanced affluent societies is that they give their citizens greater space to fall back on an old, deeply ingrained cultural frame as they try to make sense of themselves and others and organize their choices and behaviors accordingly. In the context of economic, legal, and political processes that push against gender inequality in such societies, this reanchoring in the gender frame takes the form of reinvestments in cultural ideas of gender difference. But gender difference is culturally defined in terms that imply gender hierarchy. Thus, although the degree of inequality may decline, we are unlikely to fully eliminate the ordinal hierarchy between men and women in a society that intensifies its organization on the basis of gender difference.

CONCLUSION

With these examples, I hope I have been convincing that we cannot understand the shape that the gendered structure of society takes without taking into account the background effects of gender as a primary cultural frame for organizing social relations. I hope I have also been convincing that the theoretical tension some feel between micro-interactional and institutional approaches to gender is unnecessary. When it comes to gender, the effects of processes at one level cannot be understood without reference to those at the other level. Although the gender frame acts through the sense-making of individuals as they try to coordinate their behaviors, it does more than add texture and detail to a structural account of gender and society. When considered jointly with an institutional or structural analysis, the effects of the gender frame help us see how gender becomes embedded in new organizational forms and material arrangements. This analysis also suggests that change in the gendered system of a society will be iterative and may not always proceed smoothly. The forces for change come from political, economic, and technological factors that alter the everyday material arrangements between men and women in ways that undercut traditional views of status differences between men and women. The initial impact of such material changes is often blunted because people reinterpret the meaning of these changes through the lens of their existing, more conservative gender beliefs. Yet, even as people do this, the material changes make those more conservative gender beliefs harder and harder to sustain as meaningful representations of men and women in everyday life. If, over time, changes in the material

arrangements between men and women continue to accumulate, the traditional content of cultural beliefs about gender will gradually change as well. A single wave does not move a sandbar, but wave after wave does.

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