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The power of institutions: The case of gendered agency

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Even if the substantial content of gender distinction has varied in history according to time and place, most cultures in the world have seen the distinction itself as a quite natural thing without much need for explanation (Burguière & al. 1996a; Therborn 2004). In the course of European and North American modernization, however, this deceptive surface of the self-evidence of gender distinction broke down, and at least three successive waves of gender radicalism emerged, starting roughly in the latter half of the 19th century, in the 1960s and the 1980s (Jallinoja 1980; Burguière & al. 1996b; Therborn 2011). All the waves have sought to promote equality between the sex groups by understanding men and women, in the case of the first wave, as naturally different but equal; in the case of the second wave, as being in different sex role positions, the holders of which should be entitled to equal rights and duties; and in the case of the third wave, as cultural constructions. Due to the publication time the context of this chapter is the third wave of gender radicalism in the tumult of which queer theories such as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and other forms of radical cultural constructionism emphasize the cultural nature of the established binary gender distinction. As one of its consequences the emergence of such thoroughly cultural interpretations has made room for such sociobiological reverse mirror images as David C. Geary's *Male, Female. The Evolution of Human Sex Difference* (1998), which has it that much of gender is actually based on biology. In this chapter, instead of choosing our side in the above debate, we attempt to outline a synthetic conception to provide a frame for cumulative research.

In one sense then, this chapter is about how to analyse different debates concerning gender and enable mediation between the different approaches. However, our strategy of building mediation is based on an institutionalist point of departure, whereas the institutionalism debate has mainly been going on in fields other than gender studies. Therefore, it may turn out that adopting institutionalist arguments to the study of gender makes some features of the social reality surface that have hitherto been neglected in the institutionalism debate. This is why we believe that the results in the field of the study of gender may have implications also for institutionalist endeavours in other fields, such as the studies of age, ethnicity and class in the future.

The chapter opens with a section on the simplest conception for understanding and interpreting agency, that is, a conception based on the idea that humans are natural beings with a set of biological dispositions to act in ways specific to the human species. This conception is then made more complex by adding behavioural determinants in a step-by-step process, in which the first step is formed by including into the theoretical toolbox

rational choice calculation based on utility, and the next steps by introducing a variety of institutionalist approaches. The cumulated theoretical scheme with six distinct but interrelated explanatory strategies is then applied to the phenomenon of gender, in the context of which the mutual relations of the strategies are discussed, mediation between them is built up and their implications for the study of gender are discussed. Finally, a conclusion is made and three tasks for future studies are outlined. Contribution to semiotic sociology is obvious and explicit as long as emphasis is on the second term, i.e., 'sociology'. The first term, i.e., 'semiotic' does not appear in the text but relevance to it is rather obvious, especially in the latter half of the chapter where different types of institutionalism and interpretation of meaning in the forms of cultural institutionalism are discussed.

Interpreting agency: Biology and rational choice

Agency has been defined as a subject's ability to act (or abstain from acting) in a way that makes a difference in a given situation. In such a definition, the faculty of agency is synonymous to the possession of (some amount of) power. (Giddens 1976 and Chapter 4 here.) The possession of power, however, does not necessarily imply that the subject is aware of its powerfulness. A small child's cry in the night is powerful enough to draw both parents away from their warm bed to the room of the child, and the child may be aware of that before starting to cry. However, especially in the case of a young baby, this may not be the case, but the cry is still powerful enough to get the parents there in a few seconds. In the former case we talk about action, which is such a subclass of agency, where the agent is aware of its action as a project oriented towards the future and employs some kind of a means-ends calculation (Weber 1922; Schutz 1932; Parsons 1937). In the case of an unwittingly crying baby, we are also dealing with a form of agency in the sense that the agent's behaviour determines the behaviour of others and brings therefore forth states of affairs that would not have emerged without the agent's behaviour. However, as the agent's behaviour takes place unwittingly, the agent itself is not aware of its behaviour and, even if it is a form of agency, it cannot be seen as action proper.

There are several alternative ways to explain human agency. What we term *biological* is the conception based on the idea that all that is needed for a covering explanation is to understand humans as natural beings with a set of biological dispositions to act in ways specific to the human species. As we humans actually are corporeal beings and, more specifically, primate mammals incapable of enduring without shelter and nutrition and of reproducing without heterosexual intercourse preceded by partner selection of one form or another, there obviously is some anthropologically universal truth in this approach. One of its benefits is that it is good for explaining agency taking place unwittingly. However, it is debatable how far exactly the biological approach can be stretched. Most modern socio-biologists seem to find that there is room for culture dependent variation between different societies and phases of the evolution of the human species. One example is provided by David C. Geary in his previously already mentioned *Male, Female. The Evolution of Human Sex Difference*. In the concluding chapter Geary writes:

‘Unfortunately, many laypersons and members of the scientific community incorrectly assume that human sex differences that have biological origins are unchangeable.’ Yet, according to Geary, the task is to study

> how an understanding of sexual selection can not only provide a more complete scientific comprehension of sex differences but can also be used to change the associated sex differences in ways that are socially and individually beneficial. Just as research in the biological and medical sciences has reduced the pain and suffering that were an integral part of our evolutionary past (e.g., infectious diseases), biologically informed psychological research on social, emotional, behavioural, and cognitive processes that have been shaped by evolutionary selection can result in strategies for changing the ways in which these evolved biases are expressed in modern society. (Geary 1998: 330–31.)

However, one of the questions left unanswered in Geary’s interpretation is: What determines our choices concerning the guidelines according to which we should work if the set task is to transform gender-related practices?

One possible answer to the question is to bring in another elementary way of interpreting human agency, a viewpoint called the *rational choice approach*. In its most simplistic form, it assumes that all human subjects act in all circumstances in ways that maximize their utility (Becker 1976). More elaborate versions argue that in the agency of mothers, soldiers and firefighters it may well not be personal utility, but the utility of the family, the nation or some other collective that is the motivating force behind the subject’s agency (Elster 1989). Even then the pure forms of the rational choice approach require that all social norms and value commitments which seem to be beyond the rational calculation of the maximization of utility should in the last instance be derived from maximizing choices (for the most ambitious one of such programmes, see Coleman 1990). One of the big problems of the rational choice approach has been its ability to explain different forms of agency. No doubt it has been able to develop elaborate intellectual constructions in regard to many variants of conscious action but, as it is a form of choice theory, explaining unwitting agency has been virtually beyond its reach. Following the lead of Max Weber (1922), rational choice theorists have sometimes attempted to solve the dilemma by saying that unwitting agency can be analysed ‘as if’ it were conscious action. Yet it is difficult to believe that an approach modelling with the scheme of conscious choice action defined as *not* including conscious choice would be the best available theoretical solution for its analysis (Baert 1998). Rational choice theorists therefore seem to be in need of a supplementary theoretical strategy for explaining unwitting agency.

One candidate for such explanation would be the biological approach. It would enable its advocaat to make sense of the determination of unwitting agency, and thus to get the rational choice approach off the hook, while the rational choice approach, again, would – with its principle of utility maximization – provide for the biological approach a simple and economical principle for explaining the determination of behaviour in cases in which it is not exclusively biological. This synthesis of biology and rational choice theory is how some economists explicate their attempts to build up a universal human science which would make all the other social sciences unnecessary (Becker 1976). This is also how many of the sociobiologists actually tend to think, even if they often are less explicit

in their social theorizing (Wilson 1975; Harris & Johanson 2007). And indeed, a theoretical programme with some explanatory force is emerges, and it would be a mistake to claim that such a programme would be useless in the attempts to explain human behaviour in general and gendered human behaviour in particular. However, much would still remain unexplained. Or, that is at least how an institutionalist would think. We now turn to such thinking to see whether the reservations of the institutionalist are well grounded.

An institutionalist reinterpretation: Regulations and path dependency

In the field of economics, those called neoinstitutionalists have directed attention to the phenomena of uneven economic development and diverging paths of different economies. They claim that, instead of convergence predicted by the prevailing neoclassical economics, we actually face variation. Such variation calls for explanation, and it is either difficult or impossible to provide the explanation without the concept of institution.

In *The Rise of the Western World*, Douglass C. North and Robert Paul Thomas (1973) ask why the industrial revolution occurred and the modern affluent society emerged in the colonialist Netherlands and England on the basis of the unbelievable treasures exploited in the colonies, and not in Portugal and Spain which, after all, were the first colonialists and did in no way lag behind the English and Dutch gentlemen in the art of exploitation and robbery? North and Thomas' answer circulates around the concept of property rights. They claim that property rights in Portugal and Spain were so weakly developed that it did not make sense to capitalize the riches brought from the colonies for profitable long-term business, because the risk of losing the benefits was so high. Therefore, the Portuguese and Spanish conquerors built marvellous temples and promoted artists who decorated their palaces to the benefit of the tourists of our days but did not create an expansive capitalist growth economy.[1] In the Netherlands and England, again, the legal protection of property rights was more developed and, even if some noblemen blew their fortunes even there, some did not, and this was the basis on which the emergence of the modern capitalist growth economy was built. The different paths taken by the Portuguese and Spanish economies, on the one hand, and by the Dutch and English economies, on the other hand, cannot be explained by biological facts or not even by the human attempt to maximize utility alone. What is needed in addition is the concept of institution. Even if the biological human nature and the logic of utility maximization may have been the same in all four countries, only two of them had institutions (i.e., regulations protecting property rights in this case) that framed the choices of the economic actors so that long-sighted plans to capitalize on the booty were realistic. Hence, the rise of the Netherlands and England. Hence, the fact that Portugal and Spain lost their position to the other two countries (Wallerstein 1974 and 1980). And hence, the problems of many of the developing economies of our days (World Bank 1997 and 2017).[2]

In his *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Douglass C. North (1990) gives a theoretical explication to this kind of institutionalist thinking in saying that

‘institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction’ (p. 3). He then continues by describing the institutionalists research programme and states:

> Institutions, together with the standard constraints of economic theory, determine the opportunities in a society. Organizations are created to take advantage of those opportunities, and, as the organizations evolve, they alter institutions. The resultant path of institutional change is shaped by (1) the lock-in that comes from the symbolic relationship between institutions and the organizations that have evolved as a consequence of the incentive structure provided by those institutions and (2) the feedback process by which human beings perceive and react to changes in the opportunity set (p. 7).

Such programme of institutionalist thinking is called *regulative institutionalism* by W. Richard Scott (2001) and distinguished from two other forms of institutionalism, as we will see in the next section. Before turning to that, however, some attention should be given to the question whether it would be possible and fruitful to apply regulative institutionalist thinking in the field of gender studies?

It seems that the answer to both questions is affirmative. This is because, firstly, biological constraints and utility maximization alone are not enough to explain the variation of the gender systems of the world (Burguière et al. 1996a; Therborn 2004). Secondly, it is also obvious that if we see the prevailing systems of rules as opportunity structures framing the choices that the gendered agents make in leading their daily lives, we get some explanatory resources that make these explanations better than the explanations based on the biological and rational choice vocabularies alone. Think, for example, about the different situations and opportunity structures of men and women who lead their daily lives in a secularized Northern European Protestant country, such as Finland, and in the fundamentalist Islamic Iran or Afghanistan. Even if the people were the same in terms of biological dispositions and utility calculation, the prevailing institutional structure, and therefore, the opportunity structure for men and women would still be quite different. If we restrict the comparison to Christianity and compare the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christianity (in terms of countries, say Sweden, Italy and Russia), the same holds true. This is obviously so in the case of fundamentalist social contexts, but the differences are there, even in secularized contexts, because the sets of sanctioned regulations, and therefore the opportunity structures, are different.

Bounded rationality: Normative and cultural-cognitive institutionalism

‘Bounded rationality’ is a term emerging from economics (Simon 1957). It refers to situations of choice, in which the subject either knowingly or without reflection abstains from choices which would maximize the realization of her preferences. In other words, every time when people do something that is not economically rational, we deal with bounded rationality. (Elster 1983; Wilk & Cliggett 2007.)

Most economists would count the above section about historically varying regulations and path dependency of institutional regimes already in the field of the study of bounded

rationality, as varying institutional environments rule out different choices and, thus, frame the choices of the actors in a binding way. However, when moving away from the field of sanctioned rules to social norms and value commitments, we move deeper into that terrain. Social norms may be either explicitly or more loosely formulated rules, and they are often backed by formal and explicit sanctions. However, they do not owe their force of determining peoples' agency to formal and explicit sanctions. Instead, the sanction mechanism keeping the potential deviant in line may be informal and implicit, as is often the case in the moral disapproval of the surrounding community. Even when social pressure is absent, social norms often have binding power over the subject, because the social norms and value commitments that back the norms are internalized in the socialization process. Thus, the biblical command 'you shall not murder' even if it would help you gain profit or other benefits usually applies to the relations of business partners, even in cases in which profit would be significant and the risk of punishment minimal.

Émile Durkheim (1893) understood institutions in the normative sense, and Talcott Parsons' sociological synthesis (Parsons 1937 and 1951) made *normative institutionalism* the standard theory of the sociologist. From the Parsonian point of view, a system of action is institutionalized to the extent that actors in an ongoing relation orient their actions to a common set of normative standards and value patterns (Scott 2001: 15). Thus, 'the primary motive for obedience to an institutional norm lies in the moral authority it exercises over the individual' (Parsons 1934: 326), and when a normative system is internalized in the process of socialization, 'conformity with it becomes a need-disposition in the actor's own personality structure' (Parsons 1951: 37; see also Parsons, Bales & Shills 1953).

Parsons applied normative institutionalism to several social phenomena, including the economy (Parsons & Smelser 1956). In the current context, what is most important is that he also wrote a book on the family (Parsons & Bales 1955) and several essays on gender (Parsons 1942, 1949, 1954 and 1965), and thus contributed significantly to the emergence of sociological sex role theory. According to the theory, gender is a normative institution that is grounded on the idea of the joint personhood of all adult people, but then elaborates equal personhood with differentiated sex roles with gender-specific rights and duties for men and women. The means of reproducing gender distinction are mainly those already referred to above: differential socialization, which creates differentiated identities to men and women, and social pressure, which keeps even 'undersocialized' individuals with deviant tendencies in line with normal men and women. In empirical analyses, the distinction between sanctioned rules and social norms is often gliding. It is, nevertheless, important to note that, compared to regulative institutionalism, normative institutionalism allows for analyses of the determination of agency on the basis of social pressure or internalized value commitments, which cannot be made on the basis of regulative institutionalism alone.

We move even one more step deeper into the terrain of bounded rationality if we admit that, in addition to value commitments, also peoples' cognitions vary, and this variation affects their choices and ways of setting preferences. Such an approach has been called *cultural-cognitive institutionalism* (Scott 2001). It was made known in the field of

organization studies along with the publication of *New Institutionalism in Organizational Studies*, which was an extremely popular compilation of articles edited by Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio (1991), even if its theoretical backbone was already present in the tradition of phenomenological sociology (Schutz 1932; Berger & Luckmann 1966; Garfinkel 1967). Although phenomenological sociologists diverged in their objects of interest – Schutz was quite philosophically oriented, Berger and Luckmann were mainly interested in introducing meaning concepts into sociological macro theory, and Garfinkel had an interest in careful empirical studies of the accounts of meaning the subjects actually make in their everyday life – they all shared the Husserlian understanding of meaning as a reflective intentional act. Therefore, they were all compelled to understand meaning effects as one or another type of knowledge (see Chapter 2 and more thoroughly Heiskala 2011 and 2003). As we will see in the next section, some problems emerged from such an approach, but in phenomenological sociology, the conception of knowledge was so broadly defined that it covered all types of knowledge, including everyday knowledge (even in cases in which the subjects held false beliefs), and it therefore also opened the door to various types of cultural analyses of social reality.

Berger and Luckmann define institution as a social process in which 'Institutionalization occurs whenever there is reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution.' (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 67). In the field of gender analysis, cultural-cognitive institutionalism is present in ethno-methodological analyses of gender, such as Garfinkel's study on the case of Agnes, a transgender male who was '110% female' and whose impression management therefore made visible how being a female is done in walking, sitting and talking, for example; that is, by utilizing the institution of gender as a set of interrelated typifications (Garfinkel 1967 and his successors such as Kessler & McKenna 1978 and West & Zimmermann 1987; see also Goffman 1977 and 1979, although his relationship to the phenomenological tradition is more complex than that of the other mentioned scholars).

Did these approaches bring something new into the toolbox of the gender analyst? It seems that indeed they did. The internalization of value commitments in the socialization process and the consequent emergence of personal identity with moral conscience is something that can obviously have explanatory force in the field of gender studies and cannot be drawn from regulative institutionalism. The same holds true about cultural-cognitive approaches: the varying ways in which people make sense of their social environment obviously matter in gender studies. Here, too, it would be impossible to derive the cultural-cognitive point of view from other forms of institutionalism.

Cultural institutionalism reinterpreted: Discursive and habitual institutionalism

The categorization of cultural-cognitive institutionalism as a single form of institutionalist thought has been criticized, and a suggestion has been made to further divide it into cultural-cognitive and pragmatist institutionalism (Heiskala 2007 and 2003). Based on such criticism, a distinction between *discursive institutionalism* and *habitual institutionalism* has been made by Antti Gronow (2008 and 2011). He emphasizes the

fact that Powell and DiMaggio's cultural-cognitive institutionalism is almost completely based on Berger and Luckmann's phenomenological sociology and similar approaches in which all culturally meaningful material is interpreted as the subject's knowledge, be it either in the form of expert knowledge or lay conceptions. According to Gronow, such conception is useful as long as we are interested in culture in the sense of discursive forms. However, when an attempt to cover habitual dispositions with such a conception is made, all we get is the mistaken assumption made by Berger and Luckmann and other discursive theorists that originally all habits are patterns of conscious action but then sink into the realm of routinization with the implication that their reflexive nature is left forgotten. Gronow holds this to be true in some cases but also notes that there are other kinds of habits defined as dispositions to act that emerge in the social process without the subject even being aware of their emergence. Gronow sees the pragmatist tradition as a theoretical resource for the analysis of such unwittingly held dispositions to act and draws mainly from the work of Veblen (1919), according to whom we should not start our analysis by asking why someone acts because people are always already acting in one way or another whether they are aware of this or not, and from Mead (1934), according to whom all meaning has its origins in social interaction, even if the agents are not good at recognizing this. What now emerges is one more form of institutionalist thought, which can be called habitual institutionalism, according to which, 'institutions are established and prevalent social dispositions that structure social (inter)action' (Gronow 2008: 367). What is new in this definition of institution is that it differs from that of discursive institutionalism in being so abstract that it covers in addition to reflectively followed dispositions all habitualized interaction patterns whether or not the parties of interaction themselves are aware of the habits.

Is this new distinction just an idle theorist's play with concepts? – At least in the field of gender analysis it seems to be something more. This is so because we can immediately recognize that, in addition to discursive institutionalist conceptions, there has been a boom of conceptions emphasizing the habitual nature of our gendered dispositions to act just in the sense Gronow makes the distinction, that is, as something that is corporeal and social at the same time and that takes place largely either in the margins or completely outside the subjects' conscious reflection (to mention but a few, see Butler 1990; Bourdieu 1999; McNay 2000; Pulkkinen 2000; Heinämaa 2003; Husso 2003 and 2016; Husso & Hirvonen 2012 and Hirvonen & Husso 2012).

The cumulated scheme applied to gender

If we now recall those approaches that we discussed before starting to introduce different forms of institutionalist thought and include the two non-institutionalist viewpoints into the variety of the institutionalist theoretical approaches to the determination of human action, we get a table with six columns (Table 7.1).

[TABLE 7.1 HERE]

The usual way to cope with the variety included in Table 7.1 is to restrict discussion to one or two approaches. Accordingly, if we combine Approaches 1 and 2, we get what can be called the *sociobiological approach to gender*. If, again, we combine Approaches 3 and 4, we get something that is very much the same as the *sociological sex role theory*. Finally, in combining Approaches 5 and 6, we get a field in which more recent *constructionist approaches to gender* move, some placing more emphasis on the discursive determination and others on the habitual determination of gendered agency.

Sorting out different approaches to gender is illuminating itself. However, it is not enough. To arrive at an approach that would not just sort out some alternatives and then pick one and neglect the others, which is a needless but regrettably common practice today, we make two additional assumptions. One is that all six approaches have some explanatory force. Instead of a matter of choice between different approaches, we should therefore deal more with the problem of the correct definition of the area of competence for each. The other is that the approaches should be understood to be on a gliding scale in comparison to each other, and this also holds true with the extreme ends shown in Table 1 (Columns 1 and 6). As can be seen in Figure 7.1, or 'the pie model', instead of being opposites, the biological and habitual approaches (i.e., Columns 1 and 6) can be put side by side. This is so because they share an important characteristic of being similar in the sense that they both deal with dispositions to act, and many of these dispositions are the kind that the subject follows the pattern unwittingly. However, the approaches also differ in one important sense: while in the case of the biological approach the dispositions are based on nature, in the case of socially mediated habitual dispositions they are adopted in the course of life-history. Therefore, there is a difference between the biological approach and the habitual approach, but there is also a unifying factor, which is all the more important because in empirical reality it is very difficult to tell apart the social and the biological in the agents' habitual action.

[FIGURE 7.1 HERE]

One of the implications of a conception placing emphasis on the gliding nature of the differences between the approaches is that the boundary between nature and culture in determining gendered agency has not faded away, but the Cartesian dualism, or the necessity to choose either a nature-based conception (i.e., sociobiology) or a cultural conception (i.e., some form of cultural constructionism), has been eased so that instead of having to make one fundamental choice at the beginning of the study, it is possible to opt for several research strategic choices characteristic of every phase of the research process. This is how the synthetic conception frees the energy of the research community from largely fruitless and potentially endless binary combats between opposing parties into something more interesting, that is, into the study of different forms of gendered agency.

To elaborate the relevance of the synthetic approach developed here we will now make a brief case analysis in different ways to interpret the causes of gendered violence based on a study drawing its data from Finland but providing results that are for the most part valid also elsewhere in Europe and North America (Husso et al. 2017 and 2021). In Finland, according to police statistics, male violence against women in intimate partner relationships is about nine times more common and more lethal than female violence against men. The ratio may not be exact because it is based on official police statistics and does not include all intimate partner violence; however, the imbalance between the gender groups is so striking that nobody can deny the existence of the phenomenon. How to explain this social fact?

Many common-sense explanations refer to violence as a characteristic part of the male nature and the fact that an average male is stronger than an average female (discourse 1: biological explanation). Sometimes such explanations are supplemented by an explanation of the type 'it was the only option left for a man who was verbally less talented than his spouse but physiologically stronger' (discourse 2: rational choice). Previously, even if not anymore, the husband was also legally the head of the family and thus entitled to direct the behaviour of other family members with a small amount of 'understandable', 'corrective' violence (discourse 3: regulative institutionalism). Although today family and intimate partner violence is against the law in all its forms, we still live in the condition of patriarchy and 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1987 and 1995), which make such violence culturally understandable as a part of the male identity and to certain extent as approved because abstaining from violence in certain situations ruins the male honour (discourse 4: normative institutionalism). If we take a look at cultural products such as erotic-romantic novels, films or detective stories we find a whole world full of violent and jealous men and masochistic women, and this world obviously acts as an effective storage of cultural repertoires, making male violence in certain situations understandable (discourse 5: discursive institutionalism). Finally, the male identity is formed in the course of a male life history and it includes several socially emerging gendered dispositions that escape the subject's reflection. Such masculinity and the related male habitus seems to include features that make men less resistant than women against impulses to act violently in close relationships (discourse 6: habitual institutionalism).

The question often asked in relation to explanations of the above type is 'Which of the explanations is the correct one?' – As synthesizers, our answer is: none of them alone but all of them together. There is some truth in each of the explanations and the task is therefore not to pick just one explanation and get rid of the others. Thus, in our view, researchers should not think that they are obliged to choose, for example, between a 'cultural', 'normative', 'rational choice', or 'biological' type of an explanation. Instead, what we need to do to really learn to understand the phenomenon of gendered intimate partner violence is to pick all six explanatory strategies and carefully check their area of competence against the evidence provided by all available data.

Conclusion and future tasks

Our interest here has been to develop a synthesis of six distinct but interrelated approaches to the explanation of human agency. In this concluding section, we outline three directions for future work. These are, firstly, developing further the theoretical scheme; secondly, applying the scheme in the debates on and empirical study of gender; and, thirdly, developing a more general theory of the power of institutions to shape agency.

As far as the first task is concerned, we are not the first to approach the study of gender from the viewpoint of institutions. Previous research on the topic has shown that it is fruitful to study all the existing institutions as gendered institutions (Acker 1992). In addition to that, however, we suggest that gender itself can be seen as an institution. The forerunner here is Patricia Yancey Martin, who in her 'Gender as Social Institution' presents a useful structuration-theoretical conceptualization (Martin 2004). Our approach, however, is different from hers in that we do not propose one distinct approach to the study of gender but distinguish between six approaches and claim that it can be shown on the level of theoretical elaboration that each of the six approaches can contribute to the explanation of gendered agency. We therefore believe that there is some novelty in the scheme. Yet the approach is not completed. Thus, one of the future tasks is to develop the synthetic scheme itself theoretically further. The most burning issues here are the conceptualization of social change and its drivers (usually said to be the weak spot of institutionalist thinking), and the integration of rejected meanings or ideology (Freud, Marx, Lacan, Bourdieu) into the conception. In the former issue, a great deal of emphasis must be placed on the concepts of order, chaos, conflict, evolution, and creativity (see Chapters 3 and 6; Joas 1996). In the latter issue, two routes are open. An attempt can be made either to add one more column/slice into the scheme or to develop the understanding of the six columns/slices in such a direction that ideological misrecognition can be explored within the prevailing columns. Such study, however, goes beyond the scope of this chapter and book (even if the topic of rejected meanings is discussed in Chapter 9 on a more general level) and will therefore have to be done elsewhere. According to our current understanding, though, it should take the latter route.[3]

Theoretical work and related empirical elaboration subordinated to theoretical work may make us believe that it is justified and fruitful to adopt the pattern of slicing the 'pie' of agency into six parts, as we have sought to show above. The real test of the conception, however, is not met until we move to the second task and approach the question of sizing the slices, that is, the relative significance and weight of each of the approaches and their mutual relationships. This is something that cannot be done abstractly, and it therefore requires a specified research question and data on the basis of which the question can be answered. In addition, it is obvious that historical and comparative settings provide the best means of reaching interesting results in the attempt to size the slices. Once again work in such empirical settings goes beyond the scope of this theoretical and methodological inquiry, but it leads us towards a research agenda in which alternative

explanations of empirical facts are systematically compared with each other with the intention of sorting out how much relative weight we should allocate to each of them in a given context. Our expectation is that, as already stated in the previous chapter, the explanatory relevance of the approaches will vary according to time and place.

The third task listed above for further study was to ask whether the scheme developed here has something to offer to other fields of study. Two obvious candidates for such a field are the studies of ethnicity and age. As ethnicity and age are both intimately related to corporeality and therefore resemble gender as systems of classification, it is probable that many of the results that can be reached in the field of the study of gender can be either transferred to the study of ethnicity and age, or at least used as a source of inspiration there. Yet this must be done in taking into account in addition to similarities the obvious differences (see e.g., Acker 2006 and Brubaker 2016). The case of class distinctions is even more problematic because the corporeal link is partly missing and partly socially mediated at least in two forms, that is, in the robust and concrete form by mechanisms such as class-segregated nutrition patterns, which may affect people's physical capabilities, and in the more subtle mechanism of the formation of class habitus with a distinctive form of corporeality. However, here, too, there is room for the use of the scheme at least in the field of the study of cultural justifications of social differences.

The search for uniformities and similarities between different research fields is itself important because it reveals possibilities to use work done in one field as a source of inspiration for work in another field. However, in the light of the debate on intersectionality, we would like to take one step further. In the said debate it has been emphasized, correctly, to our mind, that it is not reasonable to study gender distinctions abstractly as if people's gendered existence took place in a social vacuum (Crenshaw 1991; Browne & Mishra 2003; McCall 2005; Signs 2013). Instead, what is important is to relate gendered distinctions to other important social mechanisms of differentiation such as the above-mentioned age, ethnicity and class. It is in that sense that the intersectionality debate has been bringing gender studies closer to the strategies applied by the 'second wave' gender radicalism, which worked with sex role theories and had no problem at all in connecting the study of sex roles to the study of other roles and institutions in society. Our scheme is an attempt to bring forth a similar 'pan sociological' frame for an intersectional study of society in the 'post-third-wave phase' of gender studies. As the builders of this synthesis, we have sought to include in it at least most of the strengths of the currents that have emerged or become popular after the heyday of the second wave and its sex role theories.

Notes

1. See also Weatherford 1997: 93–108.
2. Another and more recent example of institutionalist thought is provided by Gøsta Esping-Andersen in his *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Esping-Andersen 1990; see also 1999). There he provides a description of the diverging paths taken by the Anglo-American liberal welfare regime, the North-European social democratic welfare regime and the Central and South-European conservative welfare regime. These form the three alternative paths that emerged in the West after World War II to cure and compensate the vulnerabilities of market turbulences to the citizens. In the first regime, markets and private insurances are central, in the second regime the welfare state is central and provides universal services and, finally, in the third regime services are dependent on the labour market position of the head of the household and family, church and other communities are central. Once a regime emerges it tends to respond to all problems according to the same pattern and there is plenty of inertia that resists attempts to change the developmental path.
3. W. Richard Scott hints toward the former route when he mentions in passing a fourth institutional view which he calls cathectic or emotional (Scott 2001: note 4 on page 70). However, the latter path might be more promising because there are several predecessors who have attempted to interpret one or more of the columns/slices so that they can deal with ideological misrecognition. Freudomarxism of the Frankfurt School can be interpreted as such a version of the rational choice approach (providing that we follow Parsons and see Marxism as a variant of the rational choice approach on class level). Another route for psychoanalysis to social theory was Parsons' socialization theory, which provides an example of integrating Freud's themes into normative institutionalism. More recently, Lacan and others have tried to integrate Freud even into discursive (and, to some extent, habitual) institutionalism. Bourdieu's work can also be interpreted as a different kind of an attempt to deal with the issue of misrecognition in the context of discursive and habitual institutionalism. All of the mentioned attempts to create theoretical synthesis have their faults, but their sheer volume hints toward the direction that the idea itself should not be rejected without further study.

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