CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

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Learning Objectives:

At the end of the session, we will be able to:

1.   Explain difference between theoretical and conceptual frameworks/contexts;

2.   Discuss the importance of developing a theoretical or conceptual frameworks/contexts;

3.   Critique examples of theoretical and conceptual frameworks/contexts; and

4.   Develop a theoretical or conceptual frameworks/contexts for an identified research   topic.

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK

- A FRAMEWORK provides an explicit explanation why the problem under study exists by showing how the variables are related to each other.

- RELATED TERMINOLOGIES
  - Constructs/Concept
  - Relational statement
  - Theory
  - Conceptual model

Constructs and Variables

- Constructs
  - Concepts, often complex
  - Not directly measurable
  - Also called 'theoretical variables'

- Variables
  - Something we can measure
  - Concrete measured expressions to which we can assign numeric values

Theory and Frameworks

- Classically defined, a theory is an abstract generalization that systematically explains the relationships among phenomena.
- The basic components of a theory are concepts.
- Consists of a set of statements, each of which expresses a relationship among the concepts.

The statements are arranged in a logically interrelated system that permits new statements to be derived from them.

Theories vary in their level of complexity. Some theories attempt to describe large segments of the environment and are called grand theories or macrotheories, whereas other theories are more restricted in scope.

Theories that are more specific to certain phenomena are sometimes referred to as middle-range theories.

Concepts and frameworks

- Conceptual frameworks or schemes are less fully developed attempts at organizing phenomena than are theories.
- Concepts are the basic elements of a conceptual scheme, as in theories.
- In a conceptual framework, the concepts are not linked to one another in a logically ordered deductive system. Much of the conceptual work in social sciences is more rightfully described as conceptual schemes than theories.
- Conceptual frameworks are highly valuable in that they often serve as the springboard for theory development.

Overall objective of theories and frameworks

- To make scientific findings meaningful and generalizable.
- Help to summarize existing knowledge into coherent systems and stimulate new research by providing both direction and impetus.
- Theories and conceptual frameworks are created or developed by researchers. Their creation requires imagination and congruence with reality and existing knowledge.
- All theories and frameworks are considered tentative and never proved.
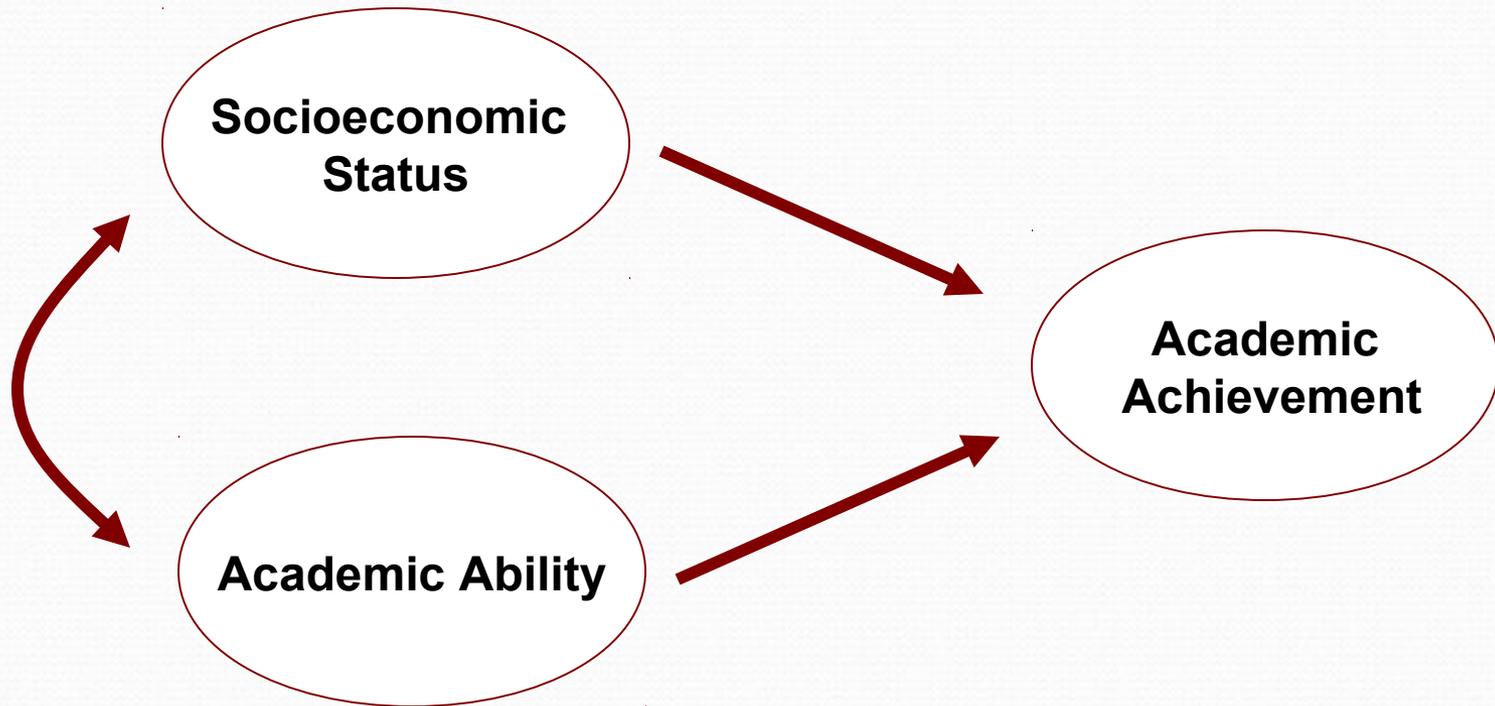
Models

- Models are symbolic representations of phenomena. Models depict a theory or conceptual scheme through the use of symbols or diagrams.

- Two types of models frequently used in research are mathematic or statistical models and schematic models (or conceptual maps).

- Models are useful to researchers because they use a minimal amount of words, which tend to be ambiguous, in representing reality.

Conceptual models

- Without a conceptual model analysis becomes sterile data mining
- In quantitative research creativity comes in developing the conceptual models
- Even in descriptive research when the objective is to describe (e.g. measure prevalence of a behavior) there is an underlying conceptual model.
- A model tells us how to interpret the world
- In quantitative research we match a theoretical model with an empirical model

An example theoretical model

Theoretical Model with Variables
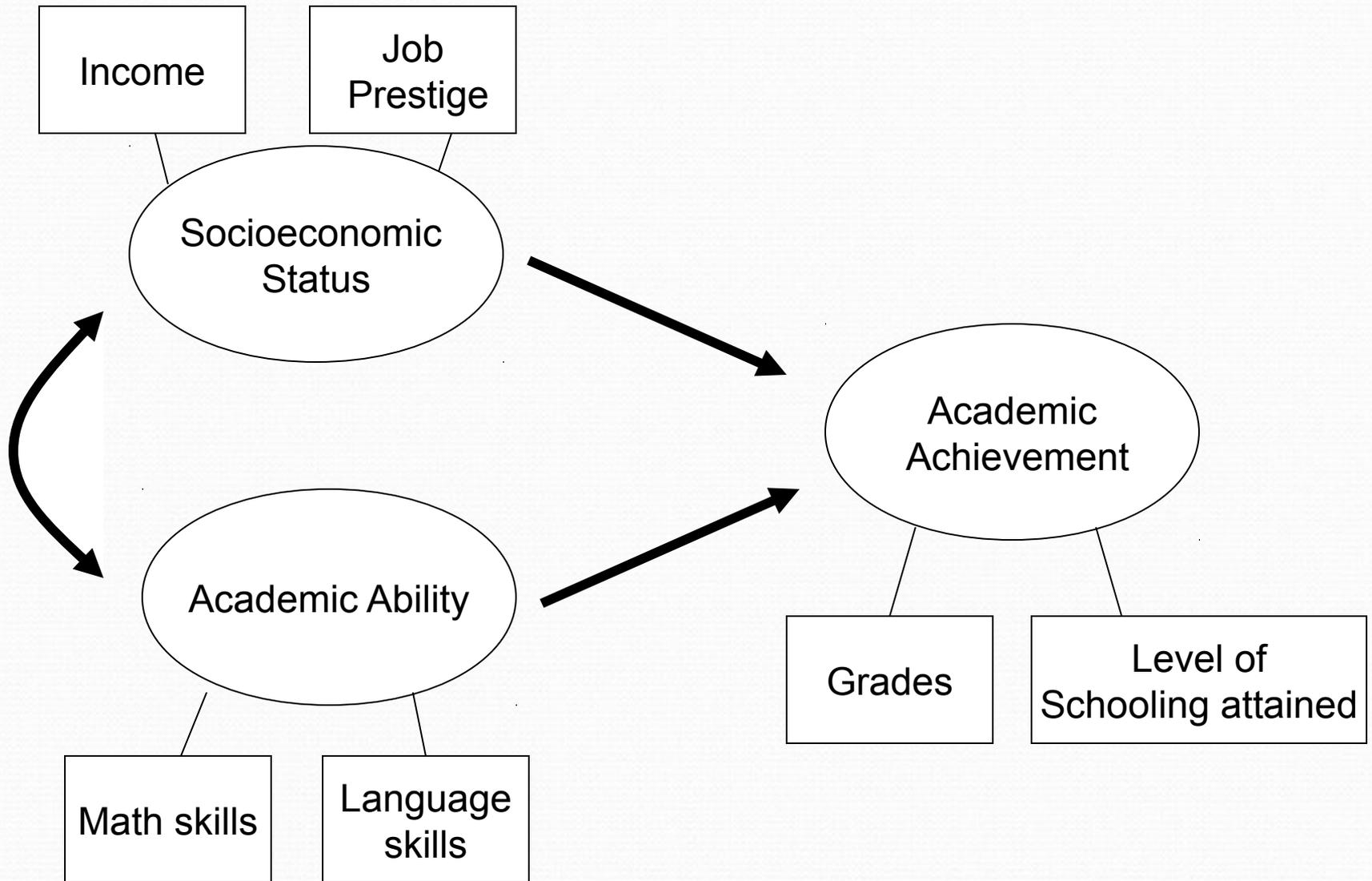
Example of a model

- In the US, blacks initiate sexual activity at much earlier ages than whites (we know this through quantitative research)

- This relationship holds even after controlling for individual characteristics

- One argument prevalent in the literature is that black culture is more permissive regarding early sexual behavior (calls for in-depth ethnographic research)

- Another explanation is blacks than whites are more likely to live in poor communities and sexual activity provides a marker of adult status and hence are more likely to engage in early sexual behavior (testable with quantitative data although also requires qualitative data for a complete understanding)

Parent's age
Employment's status
Ethnicity
Family size

Parent's education
Family income
Marital status
Living status

Parent-child attachment
(connectedness)

Parent-child communication
regarding sex

Parental
support

Parental
proximity

Perceived Parental
Expectation

Peer influence

Sexual attitude:
-Attitude towards
premarital sexual behavior
-Attitude towards
contraception

Sexual Behavior:
Have sex or not
Age at first sexual behavior
Number of sexual partner
Frequency of sexual intercourse
Consistent condom use
Outer intercourse: touching
hands, hugging/kissing, petting
upper part of body, petting
lower part of body.

Analytical Framework for the Community Assessment

Community Characteristics

- Demographic profile
- Health situation
- Economic conditions
- Governance and political context
- Infrastructure and public utilities

Perception Well-being

Cultural Context

Beliefs and Perceptions

- Notions of health and Reproductive Health
- Ideas about family planning; ideal no. of children; value of children.
- Perceptions about the use of contraceptives
- Taboos related to pregnancy

RH, Gender and Population Development Issues

- Individual
- Peers and partners
- Family/Household
- Institutional
  - Government
  - Church
  - School
  - Others
- Community
  - Infrastructure
  - Public Utilities

Needs to Promote RH Behavior

- Knowledge
- skills
- Policies and mechanisms
- Services and facilities
- Economic resources
- Others

Opportunities

- Policies
- Resources
- Advocates
- Enabling mechanisms
- Skills
- Knowledge
- Networks
- Others
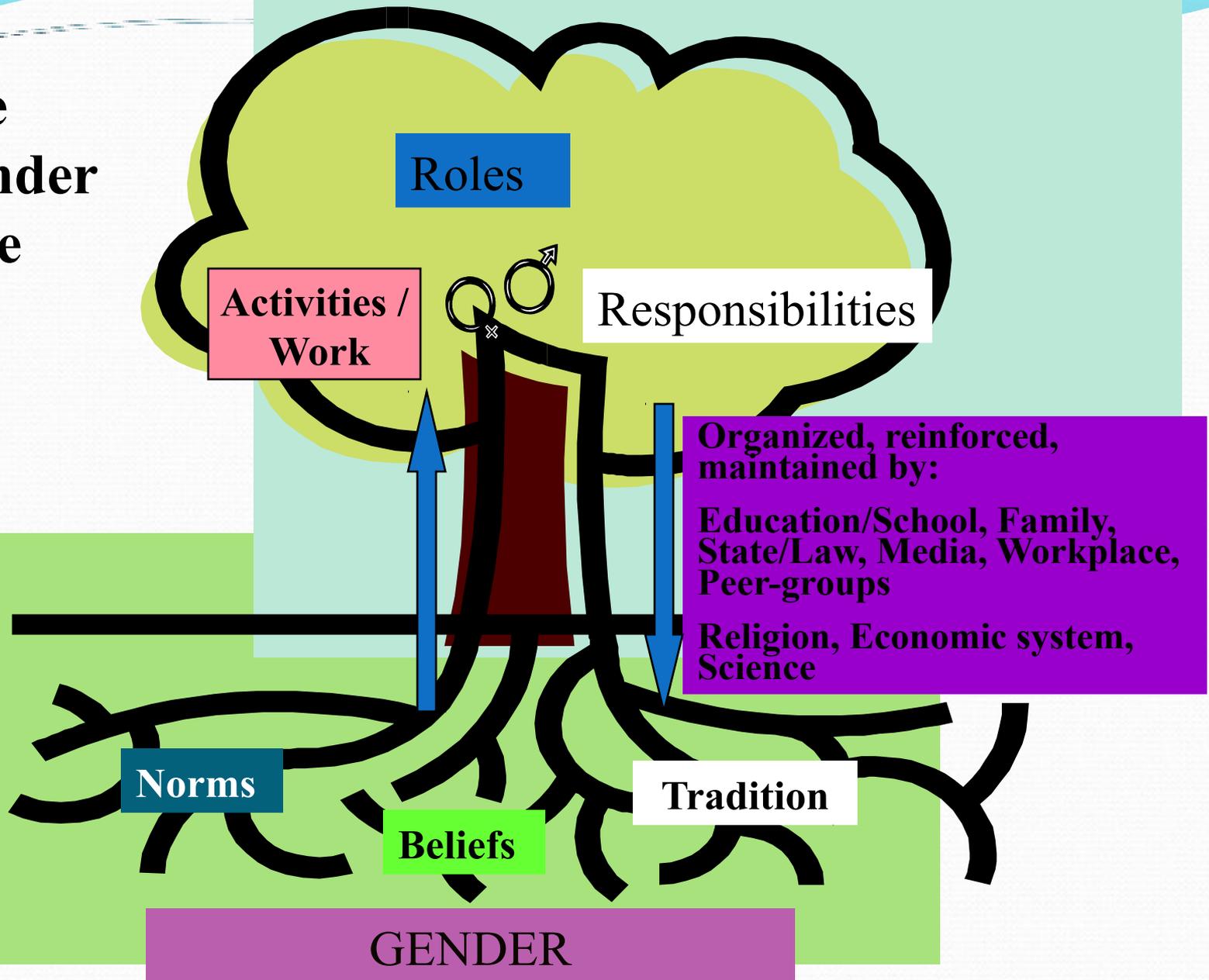
Action Programs/ Plans

- Advocacy
- Training and education
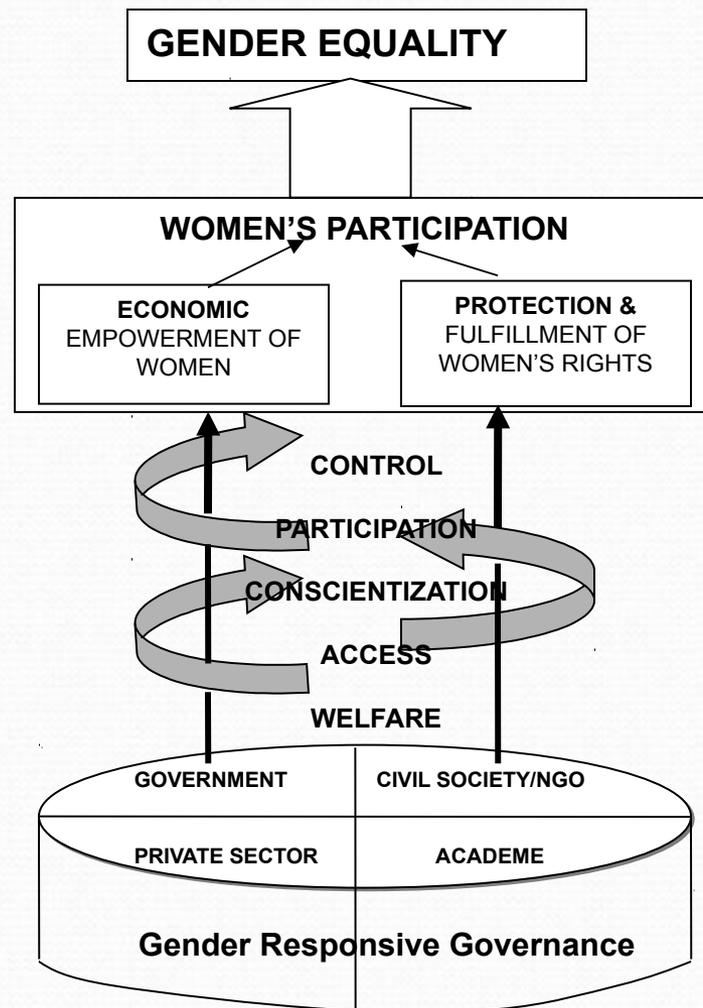- Service
- Research
- Others

Constraints

- Policies
- Resources
- Detractors
- Enabling Mechanisms
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Others

The Gender Tree

Roles

Activities / Work

Responsibilities

Organized, reinforced, maintained by:

Education/School, Family, State/Law, Media, Workplace, Peer-groups

Religion, Economic system, Science

Norms

Beliefs

Tradition

GENDER

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Plan for Women (FPW)- NCFRW

With the literature that you have reviewed, identify a theoretical framework and/or develop your conceptual framework that will guide your research problem.

Thank you….