chapter 9

Sex and Gender

"MEN ARE FROM MARS, WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS." This phrase, now part of our everyday language, is the title of John Gray's book, perhaps the most successful best-selling self-help book in world history. It has also been the title of a movie, a television show, and a board game. It expresses what many people have come to believe is a basic and simple truth: Men and women are so different that we might as well be from different planets. As Gray puts it, women and men "think, feel, perceive, react, respond, love, need and appreciate differently" (1992, p. 5). Seen this way, communication between women and men is an event of cosmic proportions, a moment of intergalactic understanding.

Yet, despite these differences, you are probably reading these words at a coeducational school, where you sit in the same classes, live in the same dorms, eat in the same cafeteria, listen to the same lectures, read the same texts, take the same tests, and are graded (you hope) by the same criteria as members of the opposite sex. At home, we live in the same houses, prepare and eat the same meals, use the same bathrooms, and often watch the same television programs as our opposite-sex family members or spouses. And I'll bet none of you has ever considered going to the dean of students to complain that because you are a Martian and your professor is a Venusian that you should receive extra credit, or at least the school should provide an interplanetary translator.

We live in a world of *both* gender difference and gender similarity. Women and men do often appear to be completely different creatures, and yet we are also able to work together and even live together.

We live in a world of *both* gender difference and gender similarity. Women and men do often appear to be completely different creatures, and yet we are also able to work together and even live together.

Gender is one of the foundations on which we build our identities. It is also one of the major ways in which societies organize themselves. Sociologists are interested in both gender identities and gender inequality.

Gender is one of the fundamental ways in which we develop an identity. Every society in the world classifies people by whether they are male or female, and a host of social roles and relationships are prescribed as a result. And virtually every society assumes that, in some basic ways, women and men are different (see Kimmel, 2003).

And in virtually every society, women and men are not equal. Gender inequality is a nearly universal phenomenon: To be a man or a woman means not only difference but also hierarchy.

Why does virtually every society differentiate people on the basis of biological sex? And why is virtually every known society also based on gender inequality, on the dominance of men over women? These are the two questions that animate the sociological study of gender.

To many observers, the answer to the second question derives from the answer to the first: Men dominate women because men and women are so different. Biological differences between women and men lead inevitably to different political, social, and economic outcomes. Men and women are unequal because nature made them different.

But sociologists take a different view. Sociologists believe that if gender inequality were simply the product of gender difference, then gender inequality would look pretty much the same everywhere. And, as we will see, gender inequality varies enormously from one culture to another. Plus, if gender difference itself were simply a reflection of natural differences, then these differences, too, would be universal. As we will see, they are far from universal.

Sex and Gender: Nature *and* Nurture

Sociologists begin by distinguishing sex and gender. When we refer to **sex** we refer to the biology of maleness and femaleness—our chromosomal, chemical, anatomical organization.

Gender refers to the meaning that societies give to the fact of biological difference. What is the significance of biological difference? Does it mean that you must—or must not—perform certain tasks, think certain thoughts, or do certain things? Sex is male and female; gender is the cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity.

Biological sex varies little—males everywhere have a Y chromosome, for example—but gender varies enormously. Specifically, gender varies in four crucial ways:

1. *Gender varies from culture to culture.* What it means to be a man or a woman in one culture may be quite different from in another.
2. *Definitions of gender change over time.* What it may mean to be a man or a woman in the United States today is different from what it meant in 1776.
3. *Definitions of gender vary within a society.* Within any one society it may mean different things to be a man or a woman depending on race, religion, region, age, sexuality, class, and the like (see Kimmel, 2003).
4. *Gender varies over the life course.* What it means to be a man or a woman at age 20 is probably quite different from what it will mean to you at age 40 or at age 70.

Each of the social and behavioral sciences contributes to the study of gender. Anthropologists can help illuminate the cross-cultural differences, while historians can focus our attention on the differences over time. Developmental psychologists explore how definitions of masculinity and femininity vary over the course of one's life. And it has been sociology's contribution to examine the ways in which our different experiences, based on other bases of identity—class, race, and the like—affect our definitions of gender.

Gender identity refers to our understanding of ourselves as male or female, what we think it means to be male or female. Sociologists are aware that other identities, like class or race, dramatically affect gender identity. Sociologists who observe the *intersection* of these identities speak, then, of gender identities as plural: *masculinities* and *femininities*. In fact, the differences *among* men and *among* women are often greater than the differences that we imagine *between* women and men. So, for example, although there are small differences between girls and boys in math and language abilities, we all know plenty of boys who are adept at languages and can barely learn the times tables and plenty of girls who whiz through math class but can't conjugate a Spanish verb.

The other major aspect of gender is inequality. **Gender inequality** has two dimensions: the domination of men over women and the domination of some men over other men and some women over other women. Making the category of identity plural doesn't mean that all masculinities or femininities are considered equal.

All known societies are characterized by some amount of gender inequality, in which men dominate women (see Coult, 1965). This is called *male domination,* or patriarchy. **Patriarchy** literally means "the rule of the fathers," and while fathers don't rule in every case, men do hold power over women.

And most societies also grant more power and resources to some men and some women. One definition of masculinity or femininity comes to dominate and becomes the standard against which everyone comes to be measured and to measure themselves. This is where race and class and the other bases of identity and inequality come in.

In 1963, the sociologist Erving Goffman described masculinity in the United States this way:

> In an important sense, there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. (p. 128)

In the next sentence, Goffman described what it feels like to *not* have all those characteristics. "Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete,

Falling outside of your culture's standard definitions of masculinity or femininity can by uncomfortable at best. Often the consequences are severe and can affect your relationships, job opportunities, and quality of life. ▼

and inferior." Because it is certain that all males will, at some point, fail to measure up to all those criteria, what Goffman is saying is that *all* males will, at some point, feel "unworthy, incomplete, and inferior."

But why do men and women in every country seem to be so different from each other? And why do we everywhere observe gender inequality?

The Biology of Sex and Gender

Most everyday explanations of gender identity and gender inequality begin—and often end—with biology. The observed biological differences between women and men are thought to lead naturally, and inevitably, to the inequality we observe. Because we're different, the argument goes, we shouldn't try to be similar. And if these differences are natural, gender inequality is inevitable; changes in male–female relations contradict nature's plan and are therefore best avoided. (This is, of course, the "nature" side of the debate; we will also discuss the "nurture" side.)

Biological arguments rest on three types of evidence: evolutionary adaptation, different brain structures and chemistry, and hormonal differences. Sociologists must be aware of these sorts of arguments because sociological perspectives on sex and gender often run counter to them.

Evolutionary Imperatives

All creatures evolve and adapt to changing environments. The differences we observe between women and men are the results of thousands of years of evolutionary adaptation (Daly and Wilson, 1999; Dawkins, 1978). Because the chief goal of all living creatures is to reproduce themselves, males and females developed different "reproductive strategies" to ensure that this happens and that they are able to pass on their genetic material to the next generation. This is called the **evolutionary imperative**.

According to this school of thought, we can see the origins of both gender differences and gender inequality in the different strategies males and females develop to reproduce. Biologically, the male's part in reproduction ends at ejaculation. He produces millions and millions of sperm cells, and his goal is to inseminate as many females as possible, increasing his chances that his offspring will survive. Evolutionary biologists argue that men are "naturally" promiscuous and extremely reluctant to commit to a relationship.

The female's part in reproduction really begins at conception. Females release only one egg at a time and require only one successful mating for conception. They must invest a significant amount of energy to ensure that their offspring is born and survives a very long infancy. For this reason, females are considered "naturally" monogamous; they seek a committed relationship with one male to help them protect the dependent offspring.

From these assumed differences in reproductive "strategies," evolutionary psychologists claim, we can see the origins of men's and women's different psychological dispositions: Men are more aggressive, want more casual sex, and avoid commitment; females are nurturing, passive, and desire commitment (Symons, 1985).

To sociologists, these evolutionary arguments are unpersuasive. They work backward, by observing some difference in sexual behavior among contemporary people and then reasoning back to its supposed evolutionary origin. Their data are selective and ignore other "natural" behaviors like altruism and cooperation. They provide more of a "just so" story, like the tongue-in-cheek ones Rudyard Kipling wrote about how elephants got their trunks or tigers their stripes.

One could take the same evidence, in fact, and construct an equally plausible evolutionary explanation for exactly the opposite results. In fact, that's exactly what primatologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy did. (See the Sociology and Our World box).

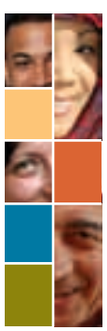
Brain and Hormone Research

There are also some differences between male and female brains, and surely the **sex hormones,** such as testosterone, result in very different gendered behaviors for women and men. Or do they?

Actually, scientists disagree about what those differences mean. Once it was thought that because males' brains were bigger than females', males were smarter. But it turned out that brain size was simply a reflection of body size and did not matter. However, recent studies of the brain do suggest some differences in which side of the brain dominates and the level of connection or separation between the two halves of the brain.

The right hemisphere is associated with visual and spatial ability; the left hemisphere controls language and reading. Males are thought to be more right brained, females more left brained; and the separation between the two sides is more pronounced in males than in females. Researchers at Indiana University's medical school measured brain activity of women and men while they listened to a subject read a John Grisham novel (see Holtz, 2000). The men showed much more activity on the left side of their brains; the women showed activity on both sides. But what this means is far from clear. One could say that such brain structure means that men are better able to compartmentalize, or it could mean that women use the entire brain.

Perhaps the sex hormones that trigger sex development provide the causes of sex differences. Sex differentiation, the process by which males and females diverge biologically, is most pronounced at two points:



Sociology and our World

Monogamous Masculinity, Promiscuous Femininity

Evolutionary psychologists argue that the size and number of reproductive cells lead inevitably to different levels of parental "investment" in children. (Males produce millions of tiny sperm; females produce only a few dozen comparatively huge eggs.) Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (1981) adds a few more biological facts to the mix. Unlike other mammals, she notes, human females conceal estrus; that is, they are potentially sexually receptive throughout their entire menstrual cycle, unlike other female mammals that go "into heat" when ovulating and who are otherwise utterly uninterested in sex. What is the evolutionary reason for this? Hrdy asks. (*Hint:* The female knows that the baby is hers, but the male can never be exactly sure.)

Could it be, she asks, that females might want to mate with as many males as possible, to ensure that all of them will provide food and protection to the helpless and dependent infant, thereby increasing its chances of survival? (Remember that infant mortality in those preindustrial cultures of origin was extraordinarily high.) Could it be that females have a natural propensity toward promiscuity to ensure the offspring's survival and that males have a natural propensity toward monogamy, lest they run themselves ragged to provide food and protection to a baby who may—or may not—be theirs? Wouldn't it be more likely for males to devise a system that ensured women's faithfulness—monogamy—and institutionalize it in marriage, and then develop a cultural plan that would keep women in the home (because they might be ovulating and thus get pregnant)? And because it often takes a couple more than one "try" to get pregnant, wouldn't regular couplings with one partner be a more successful strategy for a male than a one-night stand?

Of course, no one would suggest that this interpretation is any more "true" than the evolutionary psychologists'. But what Hrdy revealed is that one can use the same—or even better—biological evidence and construct the exact opposite "just so" story. If that's possible, it means that we should be *extremely* cautious in accepting evolutionary arguments.

1. During fetal development, when the **primary sex characteristics** (those characteristics that are anatomically present at birth, like the sex organs themselves) develop in the embryo.
2. At puberty, when the bodies of boys and girls are transformed by a flood of sex hormones that trigger the development of **secondary sex characteristics** (breast development in girls, the lowering of boys' voices, boys' development of facial hair, and the like).

The hormones responsible for these dramatic changes—testosterone and estrogen—have been held responsible as well for differences between men and women.

Much hormone research concerns the effect of testosterone on behavior, since males have much higher levels than females, and its effects seem far more noticeable. Everyone "knows," for example, that testosterone "causes" aggression. Increases in testosterone levels do cause increases in aggression. But it is also true that aggressive behavior leads to an increase in production of testosterone. So biology causes behavior, and behavior (which may be culturally induced) causes biological changes. For example, one study matched two males in athletic contests. The one whose testosterone level was higher usually won. But then they put two males with equal testosterone levels in the competition: The winner's testosterone level went up, and the loser's went down. Testosterone levels are thus responsive to changes in our social circumstances as well, so it is difficult to say that biology caused those changes (see Kemper, 1990; Sapolsky, 1997).

Biology is not necessarily destiny. Biology gives us the raw material from which we develop our identities. That raw material is shaped, molded, and given meaning within the culture in which we find ourselves. As in the example of testosterone studies, it makes far more sense to understand the *interaction* of biology and culture—to explore *both* nature *and* nurture—than to pretend that something as complicated as personal identity and social arrangements between women and men can be reduced to either nature *or* nurture.

How do we know what we know?

"Biology Is Destiny"

In the nineteenth century, opponents of women's equality used biological arguments to prevent women from going to work and to college, from voting, or even from serving on juries. Women were said to be too weak, irrational, or emotional, or too fragile and delicate.

Some tried to use statistical data to prove that women were not biologically capable of a college education.

According to Edward C. Clarke, Harvard's first professor of education, the demands of a college education would be too taxing for women, and if women went to college their brains would grow bigger and heavier, but their wombs would shrink.

His evidence? It turned out that college-educated women had fewer children than non–college-educated women. And 42 percent of women admitted to mental hospitals were college educated, compared with only 16 percent of men. (Remember that in the Middle Ages, the cause of insanity for women was believed to be a detached uterus that then floated through the body poisoning it; the word *hysteria* means "wandering womb"; thus, "hysterectomies.") Could it be that college education was actually driving women crazy—and causing them to stop having babies?

As we've seen earlier, in Chapter 4, one can draw no causal inferences from even such a strange correlation. Today, we would be more likely to attribute the decrease in family size to women's expanding opportunities, not to their shrinking wombs.

Exploring Cross-Cultural Variations of Sex and Gender

One way in which social scientists have demonstrated that gender behavior cannot all be biologically determined is to observe the remarkable differences in women and men among different cultures. Cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity vary significantly; thus, sex differences are "not something deeply biological." This quote is from Margaret Mead, perhaps the most famous anthropologist to study these cultural differences.

In her landmark book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935), Mead described three South Seas cultures that had remarkably different ideas about what it meant to be a man or a woman. In two cultures, women and men were seen as very similar. Among the Arapesh, for example, both women and men were kind, gentle, and emotionally warm. Fathers and mothers shared child rearing, and everyone seemed "trustful" and felt "cherished." Among the Mundugamor, by contrast, both women and men were equally "violent, competitive, aggressively sexual, jealous." Women showed little "maternal instinct," and they tried to avoid having babies and then breast-feeding them.

Finally, the Tchambuli were more like people in the United States, in that they believed that women and men were very different. One sex was more "charming, coquettish and graceful" and spent their days gossiping and shopping; they wore their hair long and loved dressing up with feathers and shell necklaces. They were the men. The women were dominant, energetic economic providers. They wore their hair short, wore no adornments, and were efficient and business-like. They ran economic and political life.

So, which one was "biological"? Well, if you were to have asked them, they would all say that their way was the "natural" one. All cultures, Mead argued, develop cultural explanations that claim that their way is the natural way to do things. But all arrangements are equally culturally based.

The Value of Cross-Cultural Research

Cross-cultural research explores both universality of gender difference and gender inequality and also the remarkable variety in our cultural prescriptions of masculinity and femininity and the proper relations between them. It shows that the question is not biology or culture—nature or nurture—but both. Our biological sex is one factor, the raw material of gender identity. But it is shaped, molded, and given meaning only within a culture. How much inequality does a culture have? How different do they think men and women are? Is there any room for change? If gender identity and inequality can vary so much, it can also be changed.

Contemporary anthropologists still observe two cultural universals, a gendered division of labor and gender inequality. Why does every known society organize itself so that men are assigned to do some tasks and not others, while women are assigned to do some tasks and not others? And why would they then rank the tasks that men do as more valuable and distribute resources and rewards disproportionately to men?

Sociologists used to believe that a gendered division of labor was *functional*—that as societies became more complex, dividing work from family life made more sense, and because females had and nursed the babies, they should remain at home and do all the house-based tasks while the males went off to hunt or fish.

It turned out that prehistoric societies were far more cooperative than we earlier thought. Archeologists suggest that

Cultural variations in gender differences and inequalities imply that our differences stem not only from biology but also from cultural forces that shape our identities. In some societies, males take on roles and identities that are often traditionally associated with females, and vice versa. Male beauty contest among the Wodaabe in Niger. ▼

whole villages—men, women, and older children—would all participate in hunting (see Zihlman, 1989). And everyone would tend the hearths, prepare meals, and raise children. And even if it could be shown that such a division of labor was once an efficient way to organize social life, the entry of women into every area of public life has certainly made it an anachronism.

Cross-cultural researchers offer several theories to explain the universality of gender inequality. In the mid-nineteenth century, German philosopher Frederich Engels, the collaborator of Karl Marx, observed that the three foundations of modern society—private property, the modern nation-state, and the nuclear family—all seem to have emerged at the same time. He claimed that private property both caused male domination and helped shape all modern political institutions.

Originally, Engels wrote, all families were large communal arrangements, with group marriages and gender equality. But the idea of private property brought with it several problems. How do you know what property is yours? How do you make sure your children can inherit it? How do you ensure an orderly transfer of property if you want to sell it or give it away?

The solution to these questions was the modern *nuclear family,* with a father at the head, establishing which children were his, and modern law that guaranteed the orderly transfer of property. These laws required enforcement, which led to the formation of nation-states and police. In this way, the creation of private property brought with it the modern family and the modern state.

Some contemporary anthropologists have studied why gender inequality seems so universal. Karen Sacks (1974), for example, examined what happens when a market economy is introduced in a traditional culture. She found that the more people get involved in producing for a market, instead of for themselves, the more gender unequal the culture became.

Marvin Harris (1977) argued that warfare and the preparations for war are the main causes of male domination because warfare demands that there be a core group of highly valued fathers and sons to carry out its military tasks. Males come to control the society and develop patriarchal religion—monotheism—to justify their domination.

The berdache is a great example of how cultures blur gender roles—in some cultures a person of one sex will adopt the social role of the opposite sex. Most berdaches are males who take on the female gender identity. ▼

What determines women's status?

- *Size and strength*. The more a society needs and values physical strength and highly developed motor skills, the greater the level of gender inequality (see Kimmel, 2003). Larger family size also leads to a perception of greater gender difference. This is because if the family is small, as in a nuclear family, males and females will cross over and perform each other's tasks because there is no one else to do them (Bacon, Barry, and Child, 1957).
- *Women's economic activity*. Women's economic autonomy is perhaps the chief predictor of gender equality (Sanday, 1981). The more property a woman controls—especially after she gets married—the higher her status.
- *Child care*. When the females are entirely responsible for child care, their status tends to be lower. Sociologist Scott Coltrane (1996) found that the closer the relationship between father and son, the higher the status of women is likely to be because men's participation in domestic life indicates that the sexes are seen as more similar.

Blurring the Boundaries of Gender

Another major contribution of cross-cultural research has been to challenge the simple dichotomy of two biological sexes (male and female) and two gender

identities (masculinity and femininity). In fact, anthropologists suggest that there may be far more genders out there than we know. Some societies recognize more than two genders—sometimes three or four. The Navaho appear to have three genders—one for masculine men, one for feminine women, and one called the *nadle* for those whose sex is ambiguous at birth. One can be born or choose to be a nadle; they perform tasks for both women and men and dress appropriately, depending on the tasks they are performing. And they can marry either men or women.

Numerous cultures have a clearly defined gender role for the *berdache*. A berdache is a member of one biological sex who takes the social role of the other sex, usually a biological male who dresses and acts as a woman. In most cases, they are not treated as freaks or deviants but are revered as special and enjoy high social and economic status; many even become shamans or religious figures (Williams, 1986). There are fewer female berdaches, although one Native American culture permits parents to decide that, if they feel they have produced too many daughters, they may therefore raise one as a son.

Becoming Gendered: Learning Gender Identity

How do we become gendered? How do little biological males and females grow up to be adult men and women? In a sense, our entire society is organized to make sure that happens, that males and females become gendered men and women. From large-scale institutions like family, religion, and schools, to everyday interactions like the kinds of toys we play with and the television programs we watch—we are constantly inundated with messages about appropriate gender behavior.

In a critique of biological research on gender differences, Harvard biologist Ruth Hubbard writes:

> If a society puts half its children into short skirts and warns them not to move in ways that reveal their panties, while putting the other half into jeans and overalls and encouraging them to climb trees, play ball, and participate in other vigorous outdoor games; if later, during adolescence, the children who have been wearing trousers are urged to "eat like growing boys" while the children in skirts are warned to watch their weight and not get fat; if the half in jeans runs around in sneakers and boots, while the half in skirts totters about on spike heels, then these two groups will be biologically as well as socially different. (1990, p. 69)

And what if the half in jeans and sneakers, eating heartily, were female, she seems to want us to ask, and the ones in frilly dresses and high heels and on constant diets were males? Would there be complete gender chaos, or would we simply come to believe that boys and girls were naturally like that?

"Sex brought us together, but gender drove us apart."

Did *you* know?

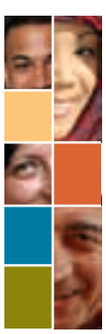
Before the late nineteenth century, boys and girls were dressed identically—like little girls, in loose-fitting dresses. Eventually, shorts and trousers were introduced, and by the early twentieth century, clothing became color coded. When children began to wear color-coded clothing, the rule was pink for boys and blue for girls. An editorial in a popular magazine explained that pink was "a more decided and stronger color" and thus more suitable for boys, while blue was "more delicate and dainty" and therefore better for girls. You can look it up! A debate in the 1910s and 1920s began to reverse that trend, and blue became the boy color and pink the girl color. And today we dress little girls more like little boys—in overalls, T-shirts, and sneakers (Paoletti, 1987, 1989, 1997). But we still avoid like the plague doing the opposite.

Gender Socialization

Gender socialization is the process by which males and females are taught the appropriate behaviors, attitudes, and traits for their biological sex. Gender socialization begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. Before you know anything else about a baby, you know its sex. "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" is the way we announce the newborn's arrival. Even at the moment of birth, researchers have found, boys and girls are treated differently: A girl is held closer, spoken to in a softer voice about how pretty she is; a boy is held at arm's length, and people speak louder about how strong he looks.

From infancy onward, people interact with children based at least as much on cultural expectations about gender as on the child itself. In one experiment, adults were told that the baby was either a boy or girl, and the adults consistently gave gender-stereotyped toys to the child—dolls and hammers—regardless of the child's reaction to them. However, the babies were assigned at random, and the boys were often dressed in pink and the girls in blue. In another experiment, adults were shown a videotape of a 9-month-old infant's reaction to a jack-in-the-box, a doll, a teddy bear, and a buzzer. Half the adults were told it was a boy; half were told it was a girl. When asked about the child's emotional responses, the adults interpreted the exact same reaction as fear if they thought the baby was a girl and anger if they thought it was a boy (Condry and Condry, 1976).

All through childhood boys and girls are dressed differently, taught to play with different toys, and read different books; and they even watch different cartoon shows on TV. As children, girls are rewarded more for physical attractiveness, boys for physical activity. Although boys and girls play together as toddlers, they are increasingly separated during childhood and develop separate play cultures.



Sociology and our World

The M–F Test

In 1936, social psychologist Lewis Terman, the creator of the IQ test, turned his attention to gender. Terman sensed that parents were anxious about their children, and, with his student, Catherine Cox Miles, Terman tried to identify all the various traits, attitudes, behaviors, and preferences that could codify masculinity and femininity. Gender identity became the successful adoption of this bundle of traits and attitudes in their famous study, *Sex and Personality* (1936).

They believed that masculinity and femininity were end points on a continuum and that all children could be placed along that continuum, from M to F. The "job" of families, schools, and other agents of socialization was to make sure that boys ended up on the M side and girls ended up on the F side. The M–F test was perhaps the single most widely used means to determine successful acquisition of gender identity and was still being used up until the 1960s.

After you took the test, the researchers could place you on the continuum from M to F. At parent–teacher conferences, parents could be counseled on how to help their "feminine" son or "masculine" daughter move back to the gender-appropriate side. Terman and Miles were especially concerned that boys who scored high on the F side would turn out to be homosexual: "If they showed undue feminine tendencies special care should be exercised to give them opportunity to develop masculine characteristics" (Terman and Miles, 1936).

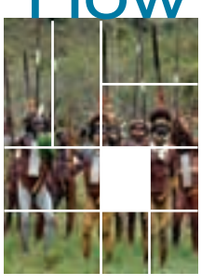
This often means that boys play on one side of the playground and girls play on the other. In a study of children's play, sociologist Barrie Thorne (1993) found that girls who attempt to cross over to the boys' side are labeled "tomboys," and they may have a much easier time being accepted by the boys than a boy who crosses over to the girls' side. He is likely to be labeled a "sissy" and will be shunned by both boys and girls.

In this way, boys and girls not only learn gender difference, but they learn gender inequality: The consequences are different if girls move "up" in the hierarchy or if boys try to move "down." This is the double message of gender socialization: You learn difference and inequality at the same time. "If I were a girl," one third grader said, "everybody would be better than me, because boys are better than girls."

After all the differential socialization boys and girls receive, what, then, are the real psychological differences between women and men? When social psychologists Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin (1987) surveyed more than 1,600 empirical studies, they found "a surprising degree of similarity" between the sexes and in how they are raised, especially in the first few years of life. They found only four areas with significant and consistent gender differences:

1. Girls have somewhat higher verbal ability.
2. Boys have somewhat better visual and spatial ability.
3. Boys do somewhat better on mathematical tests.
4. Boys were significantly more aggressive than girls.

How do we know what we know?



The Gender of Violence

The only trait for which there is significant gender difference is violence—from early childhood to old age, in virtually every culture at all times. Here is how the National Academy of Sciences put it: "The most consistent pattern with respect to gender is the extent to which male criminal participation in serious crimes at any age greatly exceeds that of females, regardless of the source of data, crime type, level of involvement, or measure of participation." Men, the authors conclude, are "always and everywhere" the more violent sex (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

While this may tempt some to return to biological explanations, biology begs as many questions as it answers. Male violence is not uniform: Males can be quite obedient and quiet, in the presence of their bosses or their teachers, even when they are angry or unhappy. Male violence seems to be activated toward some people and not others. Why would that be true if we were biologically driven to be violent?

Let's look at it another way. Let's ask about the variations in levels of violence. Surely, some cultures, such as Switzerland or Norway, are less violent than others—why would that be so, if all males are "hardwired" to be violent?

Cross-cultural research on societies with little violence finds that those cultures have a very different definition of manhood than cultures with lots of violence. In societies in which men are required to display a stoic, brave front, levels of violence tend to be high; where males are permitted to acknowledge being afraid, levels of violence tend to be lower. For example, anthropologist Joanna Overing compared the warrior tribe, the Shavante, who define masculinity as extremely aggressive and hierarchical, with their neighbors, the Piaroas, who define both masculinity and femininity as the ability to cooperate with others in daily life. The Shavante have high levels of violence and greater gender inequality than the Piaroas. The higher women's status, the lower the amount of violence (in Howell and Willis, 1983).

A recent review of all available research on gender differences found little or no difference on virtually every single characteristic or behavior (Hyde, 2005).

The Social Construction of Gender

Sociologists speak of gender as socially constructed. The **social construction of gender** means that we construct our gender identities all through our lives, using the cultural materials we find around us. Our gender identities are both voluntary—we choose to become who we are—and coerced—we are pressured, forced, and often physically threatened to conform to certain rules. We don't make up the rules we have to play by, but we do bend them and shape them to make them feel like they're ours.

Socialization is pervasive. Sociologists believe that its very thoroughness is important to examine. If the traits and behaviors we observe among women and men were so "natural" and biologically based, why would we need such constant supervision to make sure we do them right? And why would we punish those who don't do them right so harshly?

Consider our lives to be a dramatic play, says the sociologist Erving Goffman (1974). We need props and lots of rehearsing to get it right, and then we try it out on the public stage and the audience lets us know if we are doing it well—or not. Think of how many times you've rehearsed a line, using different inflections or emphases, before you actually said it. In large part, then, gender identity is a performance. We use our bodies, language, and actions all to communicate to others that we are acting our part effectively.

Psychologists use the term **gender roles** to define the bundle of traits, attitudes, and behaviors that is associated with biological males and females. Roles are blueprints that prescribe what you should do, think, want, and look like, so that you can successfully become a man or a woman.

Sociologists have suggested that the gender role model ignores several important dimensions of gender identity and gender inequality. For one thing, it seems to assume that the two gender roles are independent and equal: "his" and "hers." But sociologists point out that masculinity and femininity are not independent; we know what it means to be a man or a woman by reference to the other. Nor are they equal: Masculinity—and especially the traits associated with it—is more highly valued than femininity (Stacey and Thorne, 1985).

Nor does the term *role* adequately capture gender in its complexity. It makes as much sense to speak of "sex roles" as it does to speak of "race roles" or "class roles"—which is to say, not very much sense at all.

Gendered Institutions. Sociologists see another dimension to gender: an institutional level. Gender is not a "possession," something that you "get" through socialization and "have" for the rest of your life. It is a dynamic in all of our interactions. And it's part of the institutions we inhabit and the organizations we create. The positions we occupy—such as, for example, soldier or nurse—demand that we act in a certain way, and these ways of acting are also gendered. Soldiers are supposed to be stoic and aggressive, no matter whether that soldier is male or female; nurses are supposed to act caring and nurturing, regardless of whether that nurse is male or female. (As a result, male nurses and female soldiers have to constantly prove that they are masculine or feminine, respectively; see Williams, 1992.)

Observing how institutional arrangements are gendered often helps explain whether more men or women occupy those positions. In 2005, Lawrence Summers, then president of Harvard University, caused a big stir by suggesting that the reason that there were so few women at the top ranks of science and engineering professorships might be due to biology (Summers, 2005).

But consider the question sociologically. Most professors—no matter what their field, even sociology!—complete their formal professional training by their mid-to-late 20s, after which they typically become assistant professors. The next seven years, until they earn tenure, is often the most intense work time of their lives, when they have to devote 12 to 16 hours a day to work. By the time they "arrive," they are often in their mid-30s, and only then do they finally have time for a social life, to get married and have children.

Obviously, this arrangement works better for men, who may have wives who do the housework and child care, than it does for women, who might want to spend time developing a romantic relationship and having and raising children. It is therefore not surprising that there are more male than female full professors. Nor is it surprising that so many of those women who pursue their careers do not have children. The surprise is often that *any* mothers can balance both family and career as well as they do.

Gender is a foundation of our identity, and it is also woven into the fabric of social structures. It is one of the ways in which social activities are organized. Like race, age, class, and sexuality, both aspects of gender—individual and institutional—are bases of gender inequality.

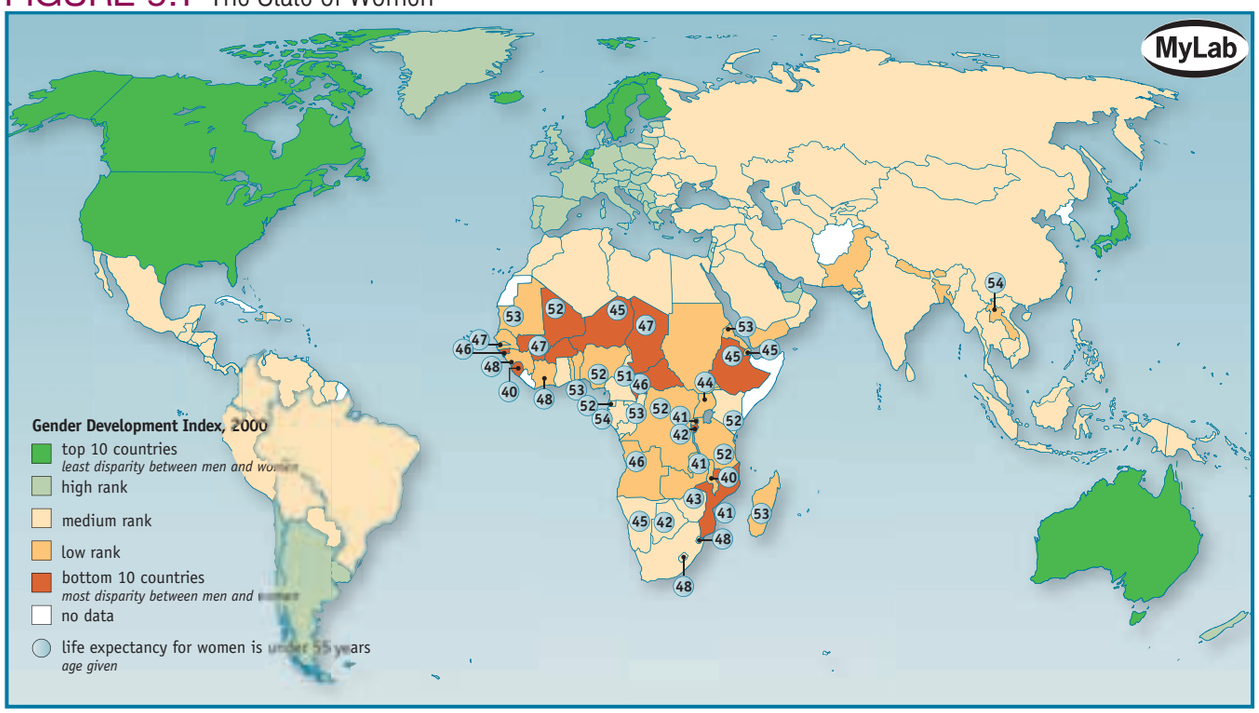
Gender Inequality on a Global and Local Scale

Discrimination against women is a global problem. Just about every country in the world treats its women less well than it treats its men (Kimmel, Lang, and Grieg, 2000). In developing countries, problems appear more fundamental and pervasive. Significant gender gaps are found in everything from literacy to education to employment to income to health in the developing world, and these gaps are larger in nonindustrialized countries. Women are disproportionately represented among the world's poor. They are often denied access to critical resources, such as credit, land, and inheritance. Their labor is far less rewarded. Their health care and nutritional needs are underserved. They have far less access to education (Figure 9.1) and support services. Their participation in decision making at home and in the community can be minimal but is routinely lower than men's (Figure 9.2; United Nations Development Program, 2006). As a result, gender inequality can be said to hurt women somewhat more in poorer nations than it does in wealthier ones.

However, this is not to say that gender discrimination in industrial countries is an insignificant problem. When the World Economic Forum measured the global gender gap in 2005, publishing an international ranking of countries based on measures like women's economic opportunity and participation, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and well-being, many wealthy countries ranked quite poorly in overall scores. Of 58 countries studied, Japan ranked 38, Switzerland 34, Italy 45. The United States ranked only 17, behind Sweden (1), Norway (2), Canada (7), the United Kingdom (8), France (13), and others (Figure 9.3; World Economic Forum, 2005).

Even U.S. women who are well off by world standards are badly harmed by discrimination based on sex—and so are their families. The U.S. **gender wage gap**—the gap between the median wages for women and for men—costs American families $200 billion every year (Hartmann, Allen, and Owens, 1999; Murphy and Graff, 2005). If working women earned the same as men for the same jobs, U.S. poverty rates would be cut in half. Nearly two-thirds of all hungry adults in America are women; globally, seven out of 10 of the world's hungry are women and girls (U.N. World Food Program, 2004). More women around the world are working than ever

FIGURE 9.1 The State of Women



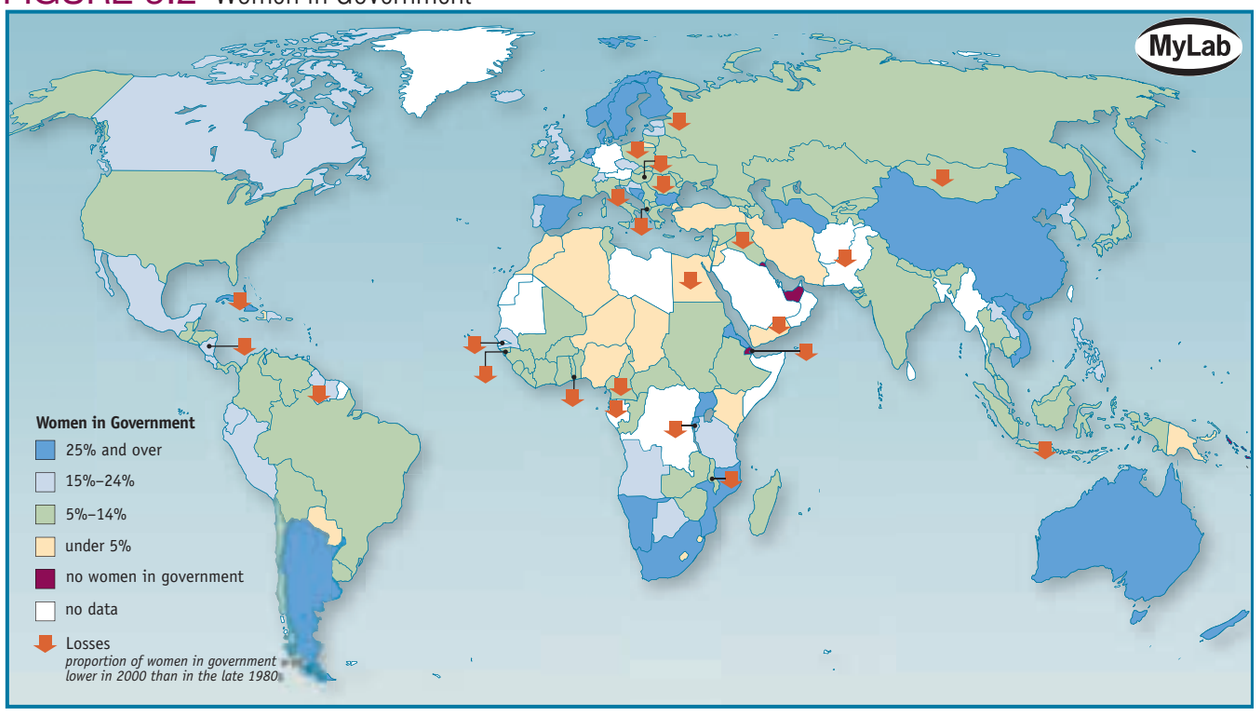
Source: From *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* by Joni Seager, copyright © 1997, 2003 by Joni Seager, text. Copyright © 1997, 2003 by Myriad Editions Ltd., maps & graphics. Used by permission of Penguin, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

before, but women face a higher unemployment rate than men, receive lower wages, and number 60 percent of the world's 550 million working poor—those who do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the poverty line of $1 a day (International Labour Organisation, 2004). Taken together, trends like these have come to be known as the **feminization of poverty**—a worldwide phenomenon that also afflicts U.S. women.

In the United States, women of color are even more burdened by gender inequality because gender inequality is usually compounded by racial inequality. In all the indicators above, the racial gap is wide. Like White women, women of color also perform what sociologists call the "second shift," the housework and child care that need to be done after the regular work shift is over. But minority women also tend to hold the lowest-paying, least-rewarding jobs, often without health care benefits or sick days (Sklar, Mykyta, and Wefald, 2001). Recent immigrants may face an additional layer, as cultural expectations derived of paternalistic cultures further compound the burdens of gender-based poverty and racism (United Nations Development Program, 2006).

Moreover, the global economy means the economic condition of both women and men in the United States is linked to that of people in other parts of the world. Driven by U.S.-based multinational corporations, all workers have become part of an international division of labor. (See Chapter 12.) Corporations scanning the globe for the least expensive labor available frequently discover the cheapest workers are women or children. As a result, the global division of labor is taking on a gender dimension. Women workers, usually from the poorest countries in the world, provide

FIGURE 9.2 Women in Government



Source: From *The Penguin Atlas of Women in the World* by Joni Seager, copyright © 1997, 2003 by Joni Seager, text. Copyright © 1997, 2003 by Myriad Editions Ltd., maps & graphics. Used by permission of Penguin, a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

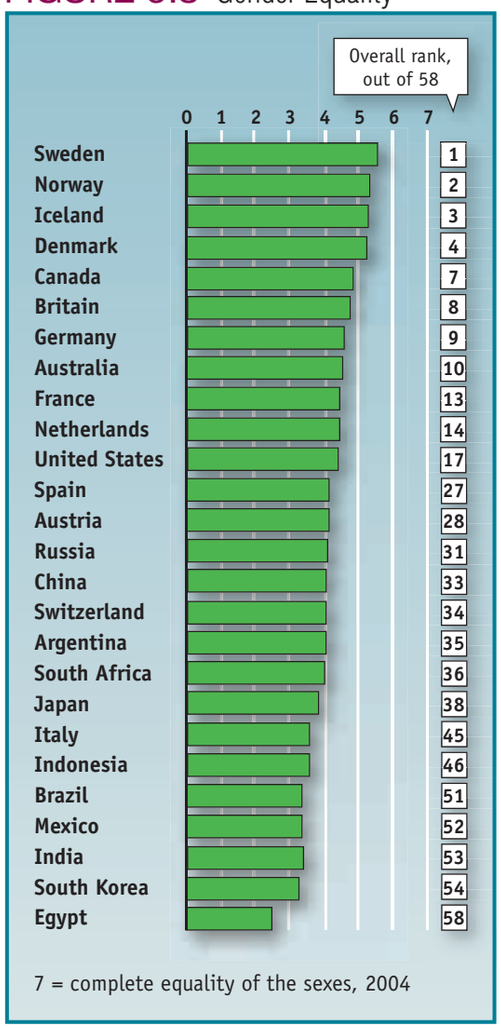
the lowest-wage labor to manufacture products sold in wealthier industrial countries (Oxfam International, 2004; United Nations Development Program, 2006).

Globalization has also changed the dynamics of global gender inequality. Just as globalization tends to unite us in increasingly tight networks through the Internet and global cultural production, it also separates us. Globalization has dramatically affected geographic mobility as both women and men from poor countries must migrate to find work in more advanced and industrial countries. This global geographic mobility is extremely sex segregated: Men and women move separately. Men often live in migrant labor camps, or dozens pile into small flats, each saving to send money back home and eventually bring the family to live with them in the new country. Women, too, may live in all-female rooms while they clean houses or work in factories to make enough to send back home (Hondagneau-Sotelo, 2001).

▲ **This billboard in Nigeria indicates a growing awareness of the problems and issues surrounding the profitable global sex trade.**

Some women and girls are kidnapped or otherwise lured into a new expanding global sex trade, in which brothels are stocked with terrified young girls who borrowed from the traffickers enough money to pay their transportation, believing they were going to work in factories. They are forced into prostitution to repay these debts, and their families

FIGURE 9.3 Gender Equality



Source: From "Sexual Equality," *The Economist*, May 28, 2005. © The Economic Newspaper Limited, London. Reprinted with permission.

are often threatened should they try to escape (U.S. Department of State, 2005; International Labour Organisation, 2005). Global sex trafficking and global sex "tourism" are among the ugliest elements of globalization and ones that the advanced nations are increasingly policing.

Although gender inequality is a worldwide phenomenon, its expressions can and do vary from country to country and from region to region within countries. In some countries, like Saudi Arabia, women may not own or drive cars, but in other Muslim countries, like Pakistan and the Philippines, women have been heads of state.

Gender Inequality in the United States

In the United States, gender inequality can be seen in every arena of social life—from the workplace to school to families, to even the most intimate and personal aspects of our lives, like to those whom we choose to love.

The Gendered World of Work

The work we do is "gendered." We have definite ideas of what sorts of occupations are appropriate for women and which are appropriate for men. These ideas have persisted despite the fact that the workforce has changed dramatically in the past century. The percentage of women working has risen from around 20 percent in 1900 to more than 60 percent today. And this percentage holds for women who have children—even if they have children under 6 years old. It's also true for all races, and for every single occupation, from low-paid clerical and sales jobs to all the major professions. Today, women represent a majority of clerical and support workers and also half or more of students in medical school and law school (American Bar Association, 2006; Association of American Medical Colleges, 2007; U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission, 2005).

Yet traditional ideologies persist about women and work. Women who are successful are often thought to be "less than" real women, while men who are successful are seen as "real men." Such ideology translates into practices: Women are paid less, promoted less, excluded from some positions, and assigned to specific jobs deemed more appropriate for them.

Gender discrimination in the workplace was once far more direct and obvious: Women were simply prohibited from entering certain fields. Until the late 1960s, classified advertising was divided into "Employment—Male" and "Employment—Female." Women were discouraged from "taking slots away from men" if they applied for jobs, or they might be asked in a job interview whether they planned to marry and have children (because that would mean they would leave the job). Can you imagine a male applicant being asked questions like that? In the summer of 1968, the EEOC ruled 3–2 that it violated the Civil Rights Act for employers to separate male and female

"help wanted" ads in newspapers, except where sex was a bona fide occupational qualification.

A recent case became famous by exploring the other side of the coin. In 1995, the Hooters restaurant chain was sued by several men who argued that its hiring policy violated equal employment laws. Hooters countered that the chain doesn't really sell food; it sells "female sex appeal" (Baden, 1996). Eventually, the case settled out of court, with Hooters paying $3.75 million to the men and their attorneys and adding a few men as bartenders—but not as waiters (Jones, 1997).

Sex Segregation in the Workplace. The chief way that gender inequality is sustained in the workforce is through sex segregation. Sex segregation "refers to women's and men's concentration in different occupations, industries, jobs, and levels in workplace hierarchies" (Reskin, 1996, p. 94). Because different occupations are seen as more "appropriate" for one gender or the other, then the fact that one job is paid more than another is seen as resulting from the job, not the gender that does it.

How many of you have worked as a babysitter when you were a teenager? If your experience is like that of my students, most of the women have, many of the men have not. And the women were paid between $5.00 and $10.00 an hour, about $20 to $50 a day. Now, how many of you have also shoveled snow or mowed lawns? Most of the men have done this, but few of the women have. Snow shovelers and lawn mowers are paid somewhere around $25 a house and make up to $100 to $150 a day. Why?

Many of you are saying that shoveling snow and mowing lawns is "harder." And by that you mean requiring more physical exertion. But in our society, we usually pay those who use their brawn far *lower* wages than we pay those who use their brains—think of the difference between an accountant and a professional lawn mower. And besides, the skills needed for babysitting—social, mental, nurturing, caring, and feeding—are generally considered much more valuable than the ability to lift and move piles of snow. And most people would agree that the consequences of bad babysitting are potentially far worse than those of bad lawn mowing! When grown-ups do these tasks—as lawn mower and baby nurse—their wages are roughly equivalent. What determines the difference is simple: Girls babysit, and boys mow lawns. That is how sex segregation hides the fact that gender discrimination is occurring.

Sex segregation is so pervasive that economists speak about a "dual labor market" based on gender. Men and women rarely compete against each other for the same job at the same rank in the same organization. Rather, women compete with other women, and men compete with other men, for jobs that are already coded as appropriate for one and not the other (Table 9.1). And while we might think that different sexes are "naturally" predisposed toward certain jobs and not others, that is not the same everywhere. While most dentists in the United States are male, in Europe dentists are mostly female. In New York City, only 25 women are firefighters, out of a force of 11,500, while in Minneapolis, 23 percent of firefighters are women, as is the fire chief. The issue is less about the intrinsic properties of the position

TABLE 9.1

The Most Male- and Female-Dominated Occupations

MALE-DOMINATED OCCUPATIONS	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN EMPLOYED
Construction managers	6.4%
Engineering managers	5.9%
Firefighters	5.1%
Installation, maintenance, and repair	4.5%
Machinists	4.4%
FEMALE-DOMINATED OCCUPATIONS	
Dental hygienists	98.8%
Preschool and kindergarten teachers	98.1%
Child care workers	94.5%
Occupational therapists	92.7%
Registered nurses	92.2%
Payroll clerks, bookkeepers, accounting clerks	91.8%*
Maids and housekeepers	90.0%

*Average of three categories within 0.3% of each other.
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Averages, 2004.

▲ **Professions like teaching are often marked by a level of gender imbalance—female teachers outnumber male teachers. Sex segregation is pervasive and sustains inequality; it's no coincidence that teachers earn relatively low salaries.**

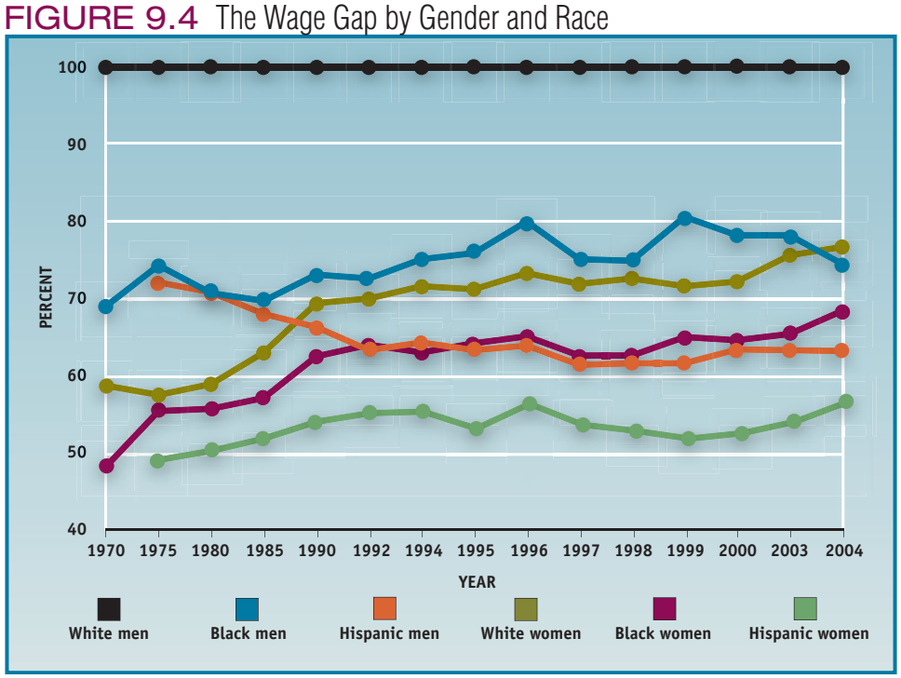
that determine its wages and prestige and more about which sex performs it. So widespread is this thinking that in occupations from journalism, to medicine, to teaching, to law, to pharmacy, sociologists have noted a phenomenon dubbed **feminization of the professions,** in which salaries drop as female participation increases (Menkel-Meadow, 1987; Wylie, 2000).

The Wage Gap. No matter where you look, women earn less than men. In 2005, the median annual income for men working full time was $41,386; for women it was $31,858, or 77 percent of men's income (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Lee, 2006). On average, a woman brings home about $184 less per week than a man. Women of color fare considerably worse (Figure 9.4).

Ironically, the gap is magnified at the management level. For every dollar earned by a White male manager, a White female manager earns just 59 cents; a Black woman manager gets only 57 cents, and a Latina manager an even smaller 48 cents (Becker, 2002). And women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds pay an enormous price for taking any time out of the full-time workforce (Crittenden, 2001; Rose and Hartmann, 2004).

The wage gap has been remarkably consistent. In biblical times, female workers were valued at 30 pieces of silver, male workers at 50—a 40 percent difference (Rhode, 1997). In the United States since the Civil War, women's wages have ranged between 50 percent and 66 percent of men's. In recent years, the wage gap has been closing, but women's wages still average about 70 percent of men's. It turns out that this is not because women's wages have been rising so much, but rather because men's

FIGURE 9.4 The Wage Gap by Gender and Race



Note: Median annual earnings of Black men and women, Hispanic men and women, and White women as a percentage of White men's median annual earnings.
Source: U.S. Current Population Survey and the National Committee on Pay Equity.

wages have been falling, and falling faster than women's (Bernhardt, Morris, and Handcock, 1995).

Glass Ceilings and the Glass Escalator. Gender inequality also extends to promotions. Women often hit a "glass ceiling," a barrier beyond which they cannot go, despite the fact that they can see others above them. The glass ceiling refers to "those artificial barriers . . . that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward within their organization into management level positions" (Martin, 1991, p. 1). For example, women hold less than 14 percent of all corporate board seats. The 30 highest-paid women in corporate America earn only 7.7 percent of what the 30 highest-paid men do (Anderson et al., 2006).

One reason the glass ceiling persists is because of the stereotypes about ambitious women. In a famous Supreme Court case (*Price Waterhouse vs. Hopkins,* 1989), a woman was not promoted to partner of a prestigious accounting firm, even though she had outperformed all the male candidates who were promoted. Her supervisors said she wasn't ladylike enough and advised her "to walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear makeup, have her hair styled and wear jewelry." The Court ordered that she be compensated and made partner.

The "glass ceiling" is different for men when they enter traditionally female-dominated occupations. As we note in the chapter on the economy and work, sociologist Christine Williams found that male librarians, nursery school teachers, and nurses do not hit a glass ceiling but rather ride a "glass escalator" to the top—in part as a way to preserve masculinity. Male nurses and librarians are promoted to administrative positions much more rapidly than their female colleagues (Williams, 1992, 1995).

Did *you* know?

Every year in early April, the president of the United States declares "National Pay Inequity Awareness Day." Why in early April? Because the average woman in a full-time job would need to work for a full year and then more than three additional months all the way until April of the next year to catch up to what a man earned the year before.

What do *you* think?

MyLab

Women and Politics

As a result of the 2006 midterm elections, the United States has its first female speaker of the House of Representatives. We also have a female secretary of state, but as of this writing, we have never had a female president. While women are gaining more seats in politics in the United States, the gender distribution is still very unequal, with local and state governments tending to have more female representatives than the national government. Still, attitudes toward women in politics vary and change over time. So, what do you think?

1. Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.
- ❍ Agree
- ❍ Disagree

2. If your party nominated a woman for president, would you vote for her if she was qualified for the job?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No
- ❍ Wouldn't vote

See the back of the chapter to compare your answers to national survey data.

Sexual Harassment at Work. Sexual harassment is also a form of gender discrimination in the workplace. **Sexual harassment** creates an unequal work environment by singling out women for different treatment. There are two types of sexual harassment. The first type is called *quid pro quo harassment,* and it occurs when a supervisor uses his (or her) position to try to elicit sexual activity from a subordinate by threatening to fire, or promising to promote, or even just repeatedly pressuring a subordinate for a date or for sex. The second type is called *hostile environment,* and it occurs when a person feels threatened or unsafe because of the constant teasing or threatening by other workers. This type of harassment is far more common but more difficult to prove. It seems to happen most often when male workers resent the "invasion" of women into a formerly all-male work environment.

Although most cases of sexual harassment happen between male supervisors and female employees, courts also recognize that women can harass men. The key is that someone uses his or her superior occupational rank to coerce someone else. In 1999, the Supreme Court also recognized that men can sexually harass another man, even if all the men are heterosexual.

Currently, in the United States, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) receives about 5,000 sexual harassment claims a year (U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission, 2005).

Balancing Work and Family. Women also face discrimination if they try to balance work and family life. If employees who get pregnant, bear children, and take care of them are less likely to get promoted, then women who want to balance work and family will face painful choices. And men may experience such discrimination, too. Men who say they want a better balance between work and family, or want to take parental leave, are often scoffed at by their colleagues and supervisors as not sufficiently committed to their careers; they may be put on an informal "daddy track" and passed over for promotion or high-profile accounts (Kimmel, 1993).

Though nearly all of us, women and men, work for a living outside the home, women also do the great majority of work *inside* the home. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1989) calls this the **second shift**—the housework and child care that also need to be done after a regular working shift is over. Housework and child care are largely women's responsibilities. Seeing housework and child care as "women's work" illustrates gender inequality, the "gender politics of housework"; women do not have a biological predisposition to do laundry or wash dishes.

Men's share of housework increased somewhat during the twentieth century, largely in response to the increasing numbers of women working outside the home. In the 1920s, 10 percent of working-class women said their husbands spent "no time" doing housework; by the late 1990s, only 2 percent said so (Pleck, 1997). But an international study of men's share of housework found that U.S. men spend no more time on housework today than they did in 1985 and do only 4 more hours of housework per week than they did in 1965 (Institute for Social Research, 2002). Today, U.S. women spend 60 percent more time on chores than men do—an average of 27 hours a week. International comparisons of seven countries—the United States, Sweden, Russia, Japan, Hungary, Finland, Canada—revealed that Swedish men do the most housework (24 hours per week) while Japanese men clock the least time (4 hours weekly). Swedish women spend 33 hours a week on housework, and Japanese women spend 29 hours. However, men and women in every nation surveyed reported that routine housework was the least enjoyable use of their time (Institute for Social Research, 2002).

The impact of gender inequality in the family on women's equality in the workplace is significant. If women are responsible for housework and child care, they are pulled away from their workplace commitments, have less networking time, and may

be perceived as having less ability to relocate, all important factors in career advancement (Allen et al., 2002). They may also be less rested and more stressed, which can affect their ability to get raises and promotions (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hochschild, 1989).

Gender Inequality in School

"Math class is hard." Those were the very first words uttered by Barbie when Mattel introduced the talking Barbie in 1992. Her hundreds of millions of owners were learning all about gender—and gender inequality.

From the earliest ages, our educations teach us far more than the ABCs. We learn all about what it means to be a man or a woman. This is part of what sociologists refer to as the *hidden curriculum*—all the "other" lessons we're learning in school. In nursery schools and kindergarten classes, we often find the heavy blocks, trucks, and airplanes in one corner and the miniature tea sets in another. Subjects are often as gender coded as the outfits toddlers wear. From elementary school through higher education, male students receive more active instruction than do females (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). Teachers call on boys more often, spend more time with them, and encourage them more. Many teachers expect girls to hate science and math and love reading, and they expect boys to feel exactly the opposite. This led researchers to describe a "chilly classroom climate" for girls.

In response, some pundits have asked, "What about the boys?" This question suggests that all the initiatives developed to help girls in science and math, in sports, and in acceptable classroom behavior actually hurt boys. It's not girls but the ideology of masculinity that often prevents boys from succeeding in school. Educational reforms are hardly a winner-takes-all game: What's good for girls is usually good for boys, too.

Close observation by ethnographers in classrooms can reveal the ways in which boys and girls approach their educations differently. Listen to how one Australian boy described his feelings about English and math class:

> I find English hard. It's because there are no set rules for reading texts . . . English isn't like math where you have rules on how to do things and where there are right and wrong answers. In English you have to write down how to feel and that's what I don't like.

A girl in the same class felt completely different about it:

> I feel motivated to study English because . . . you have freedom in English—unlike subjects such as math or science—and your view isn't necessarily wrong. There is no definite right or wrong answer and you have freedom to say what you feel is right without being rejected as a wrong answer. (Martino, 1997)

Education is often hailed as the major way to get ahead in our lives. Gender inequality in education makes that promise more difficult for everyone to achieve.

Gender equality in education is often uncomfortable. One teacher decided to treat boys and girls exactly equally; and, to make sure she called on boys and girls equally, she always referred to the class roster, on which she marked who had spoken. "After two days the boys blew up," she told a journalist. "They started complaining and saying that I was calling on the girls more than them." Eventually, they got used to it. "Equality was hard to get used to," the teacher concluded, and the boys "perceived it as a big loss" (Orenstein, 1994, p. 27).

They were uncomfortable, but they got used to it. Today, state and local governments work to eliminate gender inequality in schools because discrimination, stereotypes, and harassment hurt both girls *and* boys. Gender inequality in education actually ends up producing the differences we think are so natural.

Gender Inequality in Everyday Life

Gender difference and gender inequality also have a profound impact on our everyday lives, in our relationships, friendships, marriages, and family life. During the eighteenth or nineteenth century, only men were thought capable of the emotional depths and constancy that true intimacy demanded. These days, though, intimate life is seen largely as the province of women. Women are seen as the relationship experts, capable of the emotional expression and vulnerability that today define intimacy.

How did this change? Sociologists believe that the answer has far less to do with men being from Mars and women from Venus and far more to do with our history. The Industrial Revolution drove a wedge between home and work, emotional life and rational life. For the first time, most men had to leave their homes for work that was competitive and challenging; success in that dog-eat-dog world required that they turn off their emotions and become competitors. Women's sphere remained the emotional refuge of home and hearth. Men learned to separate love and work, while women's work *was* love. Women are "expected, allowed and required to reveal certain emotions, and men are expected or required to deny or suppress them" (Tavris, 1999, fn. 43).

As a result, women have come to be seen as the experts on love and friendship. (Men became the experts on sex, which we discuss in Chapter 10.) Sociological research on friendship finds that women talk more with their friends, share their feelings more, and actually have more friends. Seventy-five percent of women could identify a best friend; only 33 percent of men could do so (Rubin, 1986). Men tend not to sustain friendships over time but rather pick up new ones in new situations. As sociologists and psychologists understand intimacy to be based on verbal and nonverbal sharing of feelings, mutual disclosure, vulnerability, and dependency, then men's friendships are "emotionally impoverished."

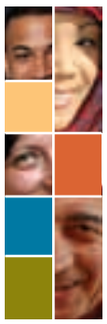
Yet other elements of masculinity—such as reliability and consistency, practical advice, and physical activity—also provide a solid foundation for friendship. Few sociologists would suggest that women have a monopoly on those qualities that make good friends.

Women are also seen as the love experts, so much so that sociologist Francesca Cancian speaks of "the feminization of love" (1987). That is because our society so positively values talking and expressing our feelings, but we also downplay "practical help, shared physical activities, spending time together, and sex," which men are more comfortable with. Of course, close loving relationships require a good deal of both emotional sharing and practical activity. The separation of spheres leaves both women and men unfulfilled. "Who is more loving," Cancian asks rhetorically, "a couple who confide most of their experiences to each other but rarely cooperate or give each other practical help, or a couple who help each other through many crises and cooperate in running a household but rarely discuss their personal experiences?"

Friendship and love are fragile because they are not secured by any social institutions; in other words, there are no formal rules for friendship or love, just an emotional bond. Marriage, by contrast, is a formal contract, a set of mutual and equal obligations.

Marriage is a deeply gendered institution. Consider how we think of it. A woman devises some clever scheme to "trap" a man into marriage. When she succeeds, her friends throw her a shower to celebrate her triumph. The groom's friends throw a raucous party, often with strippers or prostitutes, to mark his "last night of freedom."

According to this model, marriage is something she wants and he resists—as long as he can. She wins, he loses. Yet the sociological research suggests something quite different. In the 1970s, sociologist Jessie Bernard (1972) identified two types of marriage—"his" and "hers." And, she argued, "his is better than hers." Marriage benefits men more than it does women. Married men are happier and healthier than either single



Sociology and our World

How Do You Know You Are Loved?

Sociologist Cathy Greenblat asked this question of women and men who were about to get married. She also asked them how they knew that they loved the person they were going to marry. Before marriage, the answers were different but perfectly symmetrical. The men "knew" that they loved their fiancées because they were willing to do extraordinary things to demonstrate their love—spend their last dollar on flowers, drive all night in a blinding snowstorm because she was upset. Women "knew" their fiancés would do remarkable things to prove their love. They knew they loved their future husbands because they wanted to "take care" of them, to nurture and support them, because they felt tender and loving toward them. Happily for the men, that's exactly how they felt loved by their fiancées—they felt taken care of, nurtured, and supported.

So far, so good. Greenblat then interviewed 25 couples who had been married for at least 10 years. She asked them if they still loved their spouses and if they believed their spouses still loved them. What she found surprised her.

The women said they were sure they still loved their husbands, but they weren't sure, any longer, if their husbands loved them. The men said they knew their wives loved them, but many were no longer sure they still loved their wives. Still parallel but strikingly unequal. What had happened?

Greenblat reasoned that the answer had less to do with different genders and more to do with the organization of domestic life. Being married, living in the same house with someone, day after day, gives women ample opportunity to express love as caring and nurturing. But it's pretty difficult to express love if your definition of it is going far out of your way to do something heroic and extraordinary. Domestic life is more routine than that.

It's not that husbands are from Mars and wives are from Venus. It's that modern household arrangements sustain her ways of loving and his ways of being loved. What gets lost is his way of loving—and her way of feeling loved (Greenblat, 1998).

men or married women. They live longer, earn more money, and have more sex than single men; they have lower levels of stress and initiate divorce less often than married women (Gove, 1972; Gove, Hughes, and Style, 1983). They also remarry more readily and easily.

Why would this traditional definition of marriage benefit men more than women? Because it is based not only on gender differences between women and men but also on gender inequality. In the gender division of labor, she works at home, and he doesn't; outside the home, he works, and so does she (although perhaps not for as many hours). And she provides all the emotional, social, and sexual services he needs to be happy and healthy. "Marriage is pretty good for the goose much of the time," writes a science reporter surveying the field, "but golden for the gander practically all of the time" (Angier, 1999).

Of course marriage is also good for women. Married people live longer and healthier lives, have more and better sex, save more money, and are less depressed than unmarried people (Centers for Disease Control, 2006b). But as long as there is gender inequality in our marriages, it's a better deal for men.

The Politics of Gender

Because sociologists study the links between identity and inequality—whether based on race, class, sexuality, age, or gender—sociologists also study the various movements that have been organized to challenge that inequality and enhance the possibilities of those identities. Gender politics includes those who are uncomfortable with the limitations placed on them by gender roles as well as more concerted social movements that would redress more structural and institutional forms of inequality.

Opposition to Gender Roles

Many men and women have found the traditional roles that were prescribed for them to be too confining, preventing them from achieving the sorts of lives they wanted. Both women and men have bumped up against restrictive stereotypes or arbitrary rules that excluded them. Historically, women's efforts to enter the labor force, seek an education, vote, serve on a jury, or join a union served as the foundation for contemporary women's efforts to reduce discrimination, end sexual harassment or domestic violence, or enable them to balance work and family life. Women soon understood that they could not do these things alone, and their opposition to gender roles became political: They opposed gender inequality.

Many men, however, continue to find traditional definitions of masculinity restrictive. Beginning in the 1970s, they sought "liberation" from parts of that role—as "success object" or "emotionless rock." Today, some men seek a deeper and richer emotional and spiritual version of masculinity. For example, the evangelical Christian group Promise Keepers embraces a traditional nineteenth-century vision of masculinity as responsible father and provider—as long as their wives also return to a traditional nineteenth-century definition of femininity, staying home and taking care of the children.

The Women's Movement(s)

Change requires political movements, not only individual choices. The modern women's movement was born to remove obstacles to women's full participation in modern life. In the nineteenth century, the "first wave" of the women's movement was concerned with women's *entry* into the public sphere. Campaigns to allow women to vote, to go to college, to serve on juries, to go to law school or medical school, or to join a profession or a union all had largely succeeded by the middle of the twentieth century. The motto of the National Woman Suffrage Association was, "Women, their rights and nothing less! Men, their rights and nothing more!"

In the 1960s and 1970s, a "second wave" of the women's movement appeared, determined to continue the struggle to eliminate obstacles to women's advancement but also equally determined to investigate the ways that gender inequality is also part of personal life, which includes their relationships with men. Second-wave feminists also focused on men's violence against women, rape, the denigration of women in the media, and women's sexuality and lesbian rights, as well as wage disparities and the glass ceiling. Their motto was, "The personal is political."

Today, a "third wave" of the women's movement has emerged among younger women. While third-wave feminists share the outrage at institutional discrimination and interpersonal violence, they also have a more playful relationship with mass media and consumerism. While they support the rights of lesbians, many third wavers are also energetically heterosexual and insist on the ability to be friends and lovers with men. They are also decidedly more multicultural and seek to explore and challenge the "intersections" of gender inequality with other forms of inequality, such as class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. They are equally concerned with racial inequalities or sexual inequalities and see the ways in which these other differences construct our experiences of gender. Third-wave feminists also feel more empowered than their foremothers; they often feel there is no need for feminism because they can now do anything they want. Their motto could be, "Girls rule!"

There are also men who support gender equality. These "profeminist" men believe not only that gender equality is a good thing for women but that it would also transform masculinity in ways that would be positive for men, enabling them to be more

Third-wave feminists are diverse in terms of age, race, and even gender. Just look at the turnout at the World March of Women in 2000.

involved fathers, better friends, more emotionally responsive partners and husbands—fuller human beings.

Feminism

The political position of many young women today, however, is "I'm not a feminist, but . . . ." Most young women subscribe to virtually all the tenets of feminism—equal pay for equal work, right to control their bodies and sexuality—but they believe that they are already equal to men and therefore don't need a political movement to liberate them.

Feminism rests on two principles—one empirical observation and one moral stand. The empirical observation is that women and men are not equal; that is, that gender inequality still defines our society. The moral stand is that this inequality is wrong and should change. A feminist once said that "Feminism is the radical idea that women are people" (Kramarae and Treichler, 1997). One can, of course, be a feminist and like men, want to look attractive, and shave one's underarms and wear mascara. Or not. Feminism is about women's choices and the ability to choose to do what they want to do with no greater obstacles than the limits of their abilities.

There are several major strands of feminism. Each emphasizes a different aspect of gender inequality and prescribes a different political formula for equality.

Liberal Feminism.

Liberal feminism follows classical liberal political theory and focuses on the individual woman's rights and opportunities (Kraditor, 1981). Liberal feminists want to remove structural obstacles (institutional forms of discrimination in the public arena) that stand in the way of individual women's entry and mobility in their occupation or profession or the political arena. Liberal feminists have been at the forefront of campaigns for equal wages and comparable worth, as well as reproductive choice. The Equal Rights Amendment, which nearly passed as a constitutional amendment in the 1970s, is an example of a liberal feminist political agenda. The amendment states simply that: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

Liberal feminists have identified and sought to remove many of the remaining legal, economic, and political barriers to women's equal opportunity. Critics, however, claim that the focus on removing barriers to individual rights ignores the root causes of gender inequality, that liberal feminists tend to be largely White and middle class, and that their focus on career mobility reflects their class and race background (Dworkin, 1985, 2002; hooks, 1981, 1989).

Radical Feminism. **Radical feminism** states that women are not just discriminated against economically and politically; they are also oppressed and subordinated by men directly, personally, and most often through sexual relations (Brownmiller, 1976; Dworkin, 1985). Radical feminists often believe that patriarchy is the original form of domination and that all other forms of inequality derive from it. To radical feminists, it is through sex that men appropriate women's bodies.

Radical feminists have been active in campaigns to end prostitution, pornography, rape, and violence against women. Many argue that it is through "trafficking" in women's bodies—selling their bodies as prostitutes or making images of that trafficking in pornography—that gender inequality is reproduced (MacKinnon, 1988). Pornography provides a rare window into the male psyche: This is how men see women, they argue. "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice," is a slogan coined by radical feminist writer Robin Morgan (1976). Radical feminists have also been successful in bringing issues of domestic violence and rape to international attention. They have created a growing worldwide concern for a new and revived sex slave marketplace.

However, radical feminism relies too much on unconvincing blanket statements about all men and all women, without taking into account differences among men and among women. Thus, it's often "essentialist," claiming that the single dividing line in society is between men and women. That is, of all feminists, it may be radical feminists who believe that men are from Mars and women from Venus. Their claims about universal sisterhood have not been convincing to Black feminists who feel that when radical feminists say "women," they really mean "White women" (see hooks, 1981).

Multicultural Feminism. Does liberal feminism or radical feminism apply equally to all women? Do Black women or Latino women or older women or rural women have the same sets of issues and problems as middle-class suburban White women? These divisions among women are often dismissed by liberal feminists who want women to be seen as individuals, and by radical feminists who believe that all women face the same oppression *as women*.

Multicultural feminism argues that the experience as people of color cannot be extracted from the experience as women and treated separately. "Where does the 'Black' start and the 'woman' end?" said one of my students. Multicultural feminists emphasize the historical context of racial and class-based inequalities. For example, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1998) shows how the treatment of slaves in the antebellum South (before the Civil War) was also part of a differential treatment of African women and African men. Slavery was not only racial inequality; it was also gender inequality, woven into it and inextricable from it.

bell hooks (1989) argues that the focus on the family, the workplace, or sexuality as the sites of gender inequality does not track perfectly for Black women. For Black women, the family and sexuality may have been sources of power and pride, not oppression, and the workplace may not be an arena of expressing your highest aspirations.

The impact of multicultural feminism has been enormous. Today, most sociologists are following the lead of third-wave feminists and exploring the "intersections"

of gender, race, class, age, ethnic, and sexual dimensions of inequality. Each of these forms of inequality shapes and modifies the others.

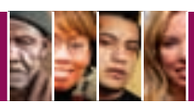
Gender Inequality in the 21st Century

There is little doubt that around the world gender inequality is gradually being reduced. The International Conference on Women sponsored by the United Nations in 1985 proclaimed a universal declaration of women's rights as human rights, including the right to reproductive control and a strong condemnation of female genital mutilation.

Living in times of great historical transformation, we often forget just how recent are the changes we today take for granted. There are still women who remember when women could not vote, drive a car, serve on a jury, become doctors or lawyers, serve in the military, become firefighters or police officers, join a union, or go to certain colleges. All these changes happened in the twentieth century. They have come a long way, baby.

At the same time, today, there is significant backlash against gender equality (see Faludi, 1991). Some people believe that women's rights are simply morally wrong, that gender equality violates some theological or eternal truth, or that it would violate our biological natures. Many men have resorted to theological or biological arguments to try to force women to return to their traditional positions of housewives and mothers (Dobson, 2004).

The struggle for gender equality has a long history, filled with stunning successes and anguishing setbacks. But for women (and their male allies) who believe in gender equality, there is no going back.



Chapter Review

1. ***What is the difference between sex and gender?*** Sex is the biological characterization of individuals as male or female. It is based on such things as chromosomes, hormones, and physical characteristics. Gender is the social construction of what it means to be male or female. Gender differences are not universal, and gender categories and meanings vary by culture, over time, within a society, and as individuals age. Gender identity is one's own understanding of one's self as male or female and is derived in a large part from socialization. Gender inequality is almost universal, with men having power over women in most societies.

2. ***How are biological differences related to gender and gender inequality?*** Biological differences between men and women have been used throughout history to justify inequality. There are three biological arguments used to explain gender differences and justify the resulting inequality. Evolutionary imperative theory holds that differences between the sexes are based on reproductive strategies. According to this theory, the main goal of organisms is to reproduce. Male and female differences have evolved over time to meet these reproductive needs. Theories about brain structure and chemistry hold that men and women use different sides of their brain more dominantly, which leads to different abilities, talents, and desires. This is used to justify inequality in the home and the workplace. Theories of hormonal differences look at how primary sex characteristics are developed in the fetal environment and how secondary sex characteristics develop during puberty. The sociological view is that biology does not equal destiny and that sex does not have to determine gender roles; gender is a result of biology and culture.

3. ***How does gender vary across cultures?*** According to Margaret Mead's research, each group or culture thinks its way of distinguishing and defining gender is the right way and the natural way. Mead says all cultures develop cultural explanations for gender differences and cultural standards for gender norms. Cross-cultural research looks at the universality and variety of gender among cultures. There is a universal division of labor by gender, which some consider functional and others consider a source of conflict derived from male domination. There is also universal gender inequality. Women's status in a society is determined by the value the society places on physical strength and family size, by women's economic autonomy, and by the allocation of responsibility for child care. Some societies have a third or even more gender categories, such as the berdache, and cultural rituals distinguishing men from women.

4. ***How do we learn to be male or female?*** Popular ideology suggests that male and female are opposites. Males and females receive different socialization based on their sex category, which in turn affects growth and development. Gendered socialization refers to how we are taught to be male or female. This continues from birth to death, and individuals act on cultural expectations for gender. Gender polarization refers to society's organization by gender, which touches every other aspect of life. Gender is constructed within the context of a group and is ongoing and changing over time. A gender role is the attitudes, behaviors, and traits associated with being male or female.

5. ***How does gender inequality manifest globally?*** Gender inequality manifests in different forms in different cultures. Discrimination against women occurs everywhere but is more stark in developing countries. But even women in wealthy countries experience inequality. Women comprise two-thirds of hungry adults and 60 percent of the working poor worldwide. Women of color experience increased gender inequality as it is compounded by the intersection with race. Geographic mobility occurs when people from poor countries have to migrate to richer countries to find work, but men and women tend to migrate and live separately. The global sex trade is a form of gender oppression in which girls and women are lured or kidnapped into slavery to serve men from wealthier countries.

6. ***What does gender inequality look like in the United States?*** Sixty percent of American women work outside the home. More women than men are receiving college educations, yet traditional ideas still persist, and ideology translates into practice. Workplaces tend to be sex segregated, which in turn leads to inequality, as sex segregation hides gender discrimination. The wage gap is pervasive and consistent but seems to be closing since men's wages have been falling. The glass ceiling and glass escalator phenomena aid or deter individuals in their climb up the work hierarchy. Women are more likely to experience sexual harassment at work, which takes the form of quid pro quo or hostile environment. Women are also more responsible for balancing the load of work and family than are men. Gender inequality also exists in school and is embedded in the hidden curriculum.

7. ***What is the politics of gender?*** Gender politics includes opposition to gender roles as too oppressive, restrictive, and arbitrary. Women's opposition to restrictions became political as they banded together to fight gender inequality. Men often also find their own gender roles restrictive, and some believe the fight for women's rights has led to reverse discrimination. The U.S. women's movement began in the nineteenth century with the first-wave feminists, who fought for entry into the public sphere, including the right to vote and attend college. The second wave of feminism occurred in the 1960s and 70s, when women were fighting obstacles to advancement and were focusing on gender inequality in their own relationships. The third wave of feminism is occurring today among the younger women who interact with and through mass media and consumerism. They tend to focus on multiculturalism and believe that the second wave of feminism is dead. Many young women do not identify as feminists but believe in the principles of feminism. They feel equal to men. Liberal feminism focuses on individual work to remove obstacles to women's freedom. Radical feminists believe inequality stems from patriarchy, and multicultural feminists believe that all women's experiences are not the same and are affected by intersections of race, class, sexuality, and so on.

KeyTerms

Evolutionary imperative (p. 260)
Feminism (p. 281)
Feminization of poverty (p. 270)
Feminization of the professions (p. 274)
Gender (p. 258)
Gender identity (p. 259)
Gender inequality (p. 259)
Gender roles (p. 268)
Gender socialization (p. 266)

Gender wage gap (p. 269)
Liberal feminism (p. 281)
Multicultural feminism (p. 282)
Patriarchy (p. 259)
Primary sex characteristics (p. 262)
Radical feminism (p. 282)
Second shift (p. 276)
Secondary sex characteristics (p. 262)
Sex (p. 258)
Sex hormones (p. 261)
Sexual harassment (p. 276)
Social construction of gender (p. 268)

What does America think?

Women and Politics

These are actual survey data from the General Social Survey, 2004.

1. **Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.** In 1972, slightly more than half of respondents said they disagreed with this statement. There was virtually no gender difference in responses. In 2004, more than three-quarters of respondents disagreed, with females being slightly more likely to disagree than were males.
2. **If your party nominated a woman for president, would you vote for her if she was qualified for the job?** This question asks about potential voting behavior, and the responses are very different from those above. In 1974, 80 percent of all respondents said they would vote for a qualified female presidential candidate. In 1998, the latest date for which statistics are available, that number had risen to above 90 percent. In both years, there was very little gender difference.

CRITICAL THINKING | DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you explain the responses above? Why do you think the researchers asked about emotional suitability for politics? Do you think if gender was not a factor in the question that emotions would have been considered?
2. Why do you think there was virtually no gender difference in responses? Were you expecting that finding? Why or why not?
3. More respondents said they would vote for a female president than said that women were as emotionally suited as men for politics. What do you think explains that difference?

▶ Go to this website to look further at the data. You can run your own statistics and crosstabs here: **http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss04**

REFERENCES: Davis, James A., Tom W. Smith, and Peter V. Marsden. General Social Surveys 1972–2004: [Cumulative file] [Computer file]. 2nd ICPSR version. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center [producer], 2005; Storrs, CT: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut; Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research; Berkeley, CA: Computer-Assisted Survey Methods Program, University of California [distributors], 2005.