CHAPTER

Inequalities of Gender

Issues of Sex and Gender
Biological or Culture? The Continuing Controversy

Thinking Critically About Social Controversy:
Biology Versus Culture—Culture Is the Answer
The Dominant Position in Sociology

Thinking Critically About Social Controversy:
Biology Versus Culture—Biology Is the Answer
Opening the Door to Biology

Gender Inequality in Global Perspective
Sex Typing of Work
Prestige of Work
Other Areas of Global Discrimination

Gender Inequality in Theoretical Perspective
Perspectives: Cultural Diversity Around the World:
Female Circumcision

Perspectives: Cultural Diversity Around the World:
Women in China
Childbirth and Social Experiences
Evaluating the Theory

Gender Inequality in the United States
Fighting Back: The Rise of Feminism
Gender Inequality in Education

Down-to-Earth Sociology: Making the Invisible Visible—The Deadly Effects of Sexism
Gender Inequality in Everyday Life

Gender Relations in the Workplace
The Pay Gap
The Glass Ceiling or the Glass Escalator?
The “Mommy Track”
Sexual Harassment

Sociology and the New Technology: Rent-a-Uterus:
Gender and Reproductive Technology

Gender and Violence
Liberal and Conservative Views on Social Issues:
Sexual Harassment and Women in the Military
Violence Against Women
A Feminist Understanding of Gender Patterns in Violence
Solutions

The Changing Face of Politics
Glimpsing the Future—with Hope
Summary and Review
N TUNIS, THE CAPITAL OF TUNISIA, on Africa’s northern coast, I met some U.S. college students, with whom I spent a couple of days. When they said that they wanted to see Tunis’s red light district, I wondered if it would be worth the trip. I already had seen other red light districts, including the unusual one in Amsterdam where the state licenses the women, requires medical checkups (certificates available for customers to inspect), sets the prices, and pays prostitutes social security at retirement. The women sit behind lighted picture windows while customers, interspersed with tourists and neighborhood residents, stroll along attractive canalside streets, browsing from the outside.

This time the sight turned my stomach.

We ended up on a narrow street opening onto the Mediterranean. Each side was lined with a row of one-room wooden shacks, the structures touching one another, side wall to side wall. In front of each open door stood a young woman. Peering from outside into the dark interior, I could see a tiny room with a well-worn bed.

The street was crowded with men looking at the women. Many of them wore sailor uniforms from countries that I couldn’t identify.

As I looked more closely, I saw runny sores on the legs of some of the women. Incredibly, with such visible evidence of their disease, customers still entered. Evidently the low price (at that time $2) was too much to resist.

With a sickening feeling to my stomach and the desire to vomit, I kept a good distance between myself and the beckoning women. One tour of the two-block area was more than sufficient.

Out of sight, I knew, was a group of men, their wealth coming from these exploited women who were condemned to a short life punctuated by fear and prolonged by misery.

This chapter examines gender stratification—males’ and females’ unequal access to power, prestige, and property on the basis of sex. Gender stratification is especially significant because it cuts across all aspects of social life. No matter what our social class, age, racial, or ethnic classification, we are labeled male or female. The images and expectations attached to these labels guide our behavior in everyday life. They are especially significant in determining power and privilege. In this chapter’s fascinating journey, we shall look at inequality between the sexes around the world and in the United States. We shall review such topics as whether it is biology or culture that makes us the way we are, sexual harassment, unequal pay, and violence against women. This excursion will provide a
good context for understanding the power differences between men and women that lead to such events as the one just described in the vignette. It should also give you insight into your own experiences with gender.

Issues of Sex and Gender

When we consider how females and males differ, the first thing that usually comes to mind is **sex**, the biological characteristics that distinguish males and females. **Primary sex characteristics** consist of a vagina or a penis and other organs related to reproduction; **secondary sex characteristics** are the physical distinctions between males and females that are not directly connected with reproduction. Secondary sex characteristics become clearly evident at puberty when males develop more muscles, a lower voice, and more hair and height; while females form more fatty tissue, broader hips, and larger breasts.

**Gender**, in contrast, is a social, not a biological characteristic. Gender varies from one society to another, for it is what a group considers proper for its males and females. Whereas **sex** refers to male or female, **gender** refers to masculinity or femininity. In short, you inherit your sex, but you learn your gender as you are socialized into behaviors and attitudes thought appropriate for your sex.

The sociological significance of **gender** is that it is a device by which society controls its members. Gender sorts us, on the basis of sex, into different life experiences. It opens and closes access to power, property, and even prestige. Like social class, gender is a structural feature of society.

Before examining inequalities of gender, let’s consider why men and women act differently. Are they, perhaps, just born that way?

**Biology or Culture? The Continuing Controversy**

Why are most males more aggressive than most females? Why do women enter “nurturing” occupations such as nursing in such far greater numbers than men? To answer such questions, many people respond with some variation of “They’re just born that way.”

Is this the correct answer? Certainly biology is an extremely significant part of our lives. Each of us begins as a fertilized egg. The egg, or ovum, is contributed by our mother, the sperm that fertilizes the egg by our father. At the very moment the egg is fertilized, our sex is determined. Each of us receives twenty-three pairs of chromosomes from the ovum and twenty-three from the sperm. The egg has an X chromosome. If the sperm that fertilizes the egg also has an X chromosome, we become female (XX). If the sperm has a Y chromosome, the egg has an X chromosome, we become female (XX). If the sperm has a Y chromosome, we become male (XY).

That’s the biology. Now, the sociological question is, Do these biological differences control our behaviors? Do they, for example, make females more nurturing and males more aggressive and domineering? Almost all sociologists take the side of “nurture” in this “nature versus nurture” controversy, but a few do not, as you can see from the Thinking Critically sections on the next two pages.

**The Dominant Position in Sociology**

The dominant sociological position is represented by the symbolic interactionists. They stress that the visible differences of sex do not come with meanings built into them. Rather, each human group determines what these physical differences mean to them, and on that basis assigns males and females to separate groups. Here people learn contrasting expectations of life and, on the basis of their sex, are given different access to their society’s privileges.

Most sociologists find the argument compelling that if biology were the principal factor in human behavior, around the world we would find women to be one sort of person and men another. In fact, however, ideas of gender—and resulting male-female behavior—vary greatly from one culture to another. The Tahitians in the South Pacific pro-
vide a remarkable contrast to what we expect of gender. They don’t give their children names that are identifiable as male or female, and they expect both men and women to be passive, yielding, and to ignore slights. The result of their socialization into gender is reported to be a gentle people where neither men nor women are competitive in trying to attain material possessions (Gilmore 1990).

Opening the Door to Biology

The matter of “nature” versus “nurture” is not so easily settled, however, and some sociologists who take the “nurture” side still acknowledge that biological factors may be involved in some human behavior other than reproduction and childbearing. Alice Rossi, for example, a feminist sociologist and former president of the American Sociological Association, has suggested that women are better prepared biologically for “mothering” than are men. She (1977, 1984) says that women are more sensitive to the infant’s soft skin and their nonverbal communications. Her basic point is that the issue is not biology or
society; it is that nature provides biological predispositions, which are then overlaid with culture (see Renzetti and Curran 1992).

Let’s consider two quite different situations, a medical accident and Vietnam veterans.

**A Medical Accident.** The drama began in 1963, when 7-month-old identical twins were taken to a doctor to be circumcised (Money and Ehrhardt 1972). The inept physician, who was using electrocautery (a heated needle), turned the electric current too high and accidentally burned off the penis of one of the boys. You can imagine the parents’ reaction of disbelief—followed by horror as the truth sank in.

What can be done in a situation like this? The damage was irreversible. The parents were told that the child could never have sexual relations. After months of soul-wrenching agonies and tearful consultations with experts, the parents decided that their son should have a sex change operation. When he was 17 months old, surgeons used the boy’s own skin to construct a vagina. The parents then gave the child a girl’s name, dressed him in frilly clothing, let his hair grow long, and began to treat him as a girl. Later, physicians gave the child female steroids to promote female pubertal growth.

---

**Steven Goldberg,** whose position in the ongoing “nature versus nurture” debate is summarized here.

---

Biology Versus Culture—Biology Is the Answer

Steven Goldberg (1974, 1986, 1993) finds it astonishing that anyone should doubt “the presence of core—deep differences in males and females, differences of temperament and emotion we call masculinity and femininity.” Goldberg’s argument, that it is not environment but inborn differences that “give masculine and feminine direction to the emotions and behaviors of men and women,” is as follows:

1. The anthropological record shows that all societies for which evidence exists are (or were) **patriarchies** (societies in which men dominate women). Stories about long-lost **matriarchies** (societies in which women dominate men) are myths.
2. In all societies, past and present, the highest statuses are associated with males. In every society, politics is ruled by “hierarchies overwhelmingly dominated by men.”
3. The reason why men dominate societies is that they “have a lower threshold for the elicitation of dominance behavior . . . a greater tendency to exhibit whatever behavior is necessary in any environment to attain dominance in hierarchies and male–female encounters and relationships.” Men are more willing “to sacrifice the rewards of other motivations—the desire for affection, health, family life, safety, relaxation, vacation and the like—in order to attain dominance and status.”
4. Just as a 6-foot woman does not prove the social basis of height, so exceptional individuals, such as a highly achieving and dominant woman, do not refute “the physiological roots of behavior.”

In short, only one interpretation of why every society from that of the Pygmy to that of the Swede associates dominance and attainment with males is valid. Male dominance of society is “an inevitable resolution of the psychophysiological reality.” Socialization and social institutions merely **reflect**—and sometimes exaggerate—inborn tendencies. Any interpretation other than inborn differences is “wrongheaded, ignorant, tendentious, internally illogical, discordant with the evidence, and implausible in the extreme.” The argument that males are more aggressive because they have been socialized that way is the equivalent of a claim that men can grow moustaches because boys have been socialized that way.

To acknowledge this reality is **not** to defend discrimination against women. Whether or not one approves what societies have done with these basic biological differences is not the point. The point is that biology leads males and females to different behaviors and attitudes—regardless of how we feel about this or wish it were different.

---

**thinking critically about social controversy**

---

society; it is that nature provides biological predispositions, which are then overlaid with culture (see Renzetti and Curran 1992).

Let’s consider two quite different situations, a medical accident and Vietnam veterans.

**A Medical Accident.** The drama began in 1963, when 7-month-old identical twins were taken to a doctor to be circumcised (Money and Ehrhardt 1972). The inept physician, who was using electrocautery (a heated needle), turned the electric current too high and accidentally burned off the penis of one of the boys. You can imagine the parents’ reaction of disbelief—followed by horror as the truth sank in.

What can be done in a situation like this? The damage was irreversible. The parents were told that the child could never have sexual relations. After months of soul-wrenching agonies and tearful consultations with experts, the parents decided that their son should have a sex change operation. When he was 17 months old, surgeons used the boy’s own skin to construct a vagina. The parents then gave the child a girl’s name, dressed him in frilly clothing, let his hair grow long, and began to treat him as a girl. Later, physicians gave the child female steroids to promote female pubertal growth.

---

**patriarchy:** a society in which men dominate women

**matriarchy:** a society in which women dominate men
At first the results were extremely promising. When the twins were 4 ½ years old, the mother said (remember that the children are biologically identical):

One thing that really amazes me is that she is so feminine. I’ve never seen a little girl so neat and tidy. . . . She likes for me to wipe her face. She doesn’t like to be dirty, and yet my son is quite different. I can’t wash his face for anything. . . . She is very proud of herself, when she puts on a new dress, or I set her hair. . . . She seems to be daintier. (Money and Ehrhardt 1972)

About a year later, the mother described how their daughter imitated her while their son copied his father:

I found that my son, he chose very masculine things like a fireman or a policeman. . . . He wanted to do what daddy does, work where daddy does, and carry a lunch kit. . . . And [my daughter] didn’t want any of those things. She wants to be a doctor or a teacher. . . . But none of the things that she ever wanted to be were like a policeman or a fireman, and that sort of thing never appealed to her. (Money and Ehrhardt 1972)

If the matter were this clear-cut, we could use this case to conclude that gender is entirely up to nurture. Seldom are things in life so simple, however, and a twist occurs in this story. In spite of this promising start and her parents’ coaching, the twin whose sex had been reassigned did not adapt well to femininity. She rejected dolls and tried to urinate standing up. Classmates called her a “cavewoman” because she walked like a boy (Diamond 1982). At age 14, in despair over her inner turmoil, she tried to commit suicide. In a tearful confrontation, her father told her about the accident and her sex change. She then chose to stop her hormone therapy, and later had extensive surgery to partially reconstruct a penis. At age 25 he married a woman and adopted her children (Gorman 1997a; “Sexual Identity . . .” 1997).

The Vietnam Veterans’ Study. In 1985, the U.S. government began a health study of Vietnam veterans. To be certain the study was representative, the researchers chose a random sample of 4,462 men. Among the mass of data they collected was a measurement of testosterone for each veteran. Until this time, research on testosterone and human behavior was based on very small samples. Now, unexpectedly, sociologists had a large random sample available, which is turning out to hold surprising clues about human behavior.

This sample supports earlier studies showing that men who have higher levels of testosterone tend to be more aggressive and to have more problems as a consequence. These veterans, when they were boys, were more likely to get in trouble with parents and teachers and to become delinquents. As adults, they are more likely to use hard drugs, to get into fights, to end up in lower-status jobs, and to have more sexual partners. With this history, you probably won’t find it surprising to learn that they also are less likely to marry. Certainly their low-paying jobs and trouble with authorities make them less appealing candidates for marriage. Those who do marry are less likely to share problems with their wives. They also are more likely to have affairs, to hit their wives, and to get divorced (Dabbs and Morris 1990; Booth and Dabbs 1993).

The Vietnam veterans’ study does not leave us solely with biology. Not all men with high testosterone get in trouble with the law, do poorly in school, or mistreat their wives. A chief difference, in fact, is social class. High-testosterone men from higher social classes are less likely to be involved in anti-social behaviors than are high-testosterone men from lower social classes (Dabbs and Morris 1990). Social factors (socialization, life goals, self-definitions), then, must also be at work. Uncovering them and discovering how they work in combination with testosterone will be of high sociological interest.

In Sum We shall have to await further studies, but what has been published so far is intriguing, indicating that some behavior that we sociologists usually assume to be due entirely to socialization is, in fact, also influenced by biology. The findings are preliminary, but extremely significant. In the years to come, this should prove to be an exciting—and controversial—area of sociological research. One level will be to document differences that are clearly due to biology. The second level, of much greater sociological significance, is, in sociologist Janet Chafetz’s (1990:30) phrase, to determine “how ‘different’ becomes translated into ‘unequal.’”
Gender Inequality in Global Perspective

Some analysts speculate that in hunting and gathering societies women and men were social equals (Leacock 1981; Hendrix 1994). Apparently horticultural societies also had much less gender discrimination than does our contemporary world (Collins et al. 1993). In these societies, women may have been equal partners with men. They may even have contributed about 60 percent of the group’s total food. Yet, after reviewing the historical record, historian and feminist Gerda Lerner (1986) concluded that “there is not a single society known where women-as-a-group have decision-making power over men (as a group).”

Let’s take a brief overview of some of this inequality.

Sex Typing of Work

Anthropologist George Murdock (1937), who surveyed 324 premodern societies around the world, found that in all of them activities are sex typing; in other words, every society associates activities with one sex or the other. He also found that activities considered “female” in one society may be considered “male” in another. In some groups, for example, taking care of cattle is women’s work, while other groups assign this task to men.

Metalworking was the exception, being men’s work in all the societies examined. Three other pursuits—making weapons, pursuing sea mammals, and hunting—were almost universally the domain of men. In a few societies, however, women participated in these activities. Although Murdock found no specific work that was universally assigned to women, he did find that making clothing, cooking, carrying water, and grinding grain were almost always female tasks. In a few societies, however, such activities were regarded as men’s work.

From Murdock’s cross-cultural survey, we can conclude that nothing about biology requires men and women to be assigned different work. Anatomy does not have to equal destiny when it comes to occupations, for as we have seen, pursuits considered feminine in one society may be deemed masculine in another, and vice versa.

Prestige of Work

You might ask whether this division of labor really illustrates social inequality. Does it perhaps simply represent arbitrary forms of dividing up labor, not gender discrimination?

That could be the case, except for this finding: Universally, greater prestige is given to male activities—regardless of what those activities are (Linton 1936; Rosaldo 1974). If taking care of goats is men’s work, then the care of goats is considered important and carries high prestige, but if it is women’s work, it is considered less important and given less prestige. Or, to take an example closer to home, when delivering babies was “women’s work” and done by midwives, it was given low prestige. But when men took over this task, its prestige increased sharply (Ehrenreich and English 1973). In short, it is not the work that provides the prestige, but the sex with which the work is associated.

Other Areas of Global Discrimination

Let’s briefly consider four additional areas of global gender discrimination. Later, when we focus on the United States, we shall examine these same areas in greater detail.

Education. These two figures illustrate how extensively females are discriminated against in education. Approximately one billion adults around the world cannot read; two-thirds are women. About 130 million children are not enrolled in grade school; 70 percent are girls (Ashford 1995). Table 11.1 illustrates this point further.
Politics. That women lack equal access to national decision making can be illustrated by this global fact: In no national legislature in the entire world are there as many women as men. The closest women come is Norway, where 40 percent of the legislators are women, but in some countries, such as South Korea, the figure is only 1 percent (Riley 1997). In Kuwait and United Arab Emirates, women can’t even vote (Crossette 1995a, b). In most nations, as in the United States, women hold about 10 percent of national legislative seats (Ashford 1995).

The Pay Gap. In every nation, women average less pay than men. For manufacturing jobs, U.S. women earn about two-thirds of what men are paid, while in South Korea women make only half of what men earn (Ashford 1995).

Violence Against Women. A global human rights issue is violence against women (Crossman 1995). Perhaps the most infamous historical examples are footbinding in China, suttee (burning the living widow with her dead husband’s body) in India, and witchburning in Europe. In addition to rape, wife beating, forced prostitution (as was likely the case in our opening vignette), and female infanticide, the most notorious current example is female circumcision, the topic of the Perspectives box on the next page.

Gender Inequality in Theoretical Perspective

Around the world, gender is the primary division between people. Each society sets up barriers to provide unequal access to power, property, and prestige on the basis of sex. Consequently, sociologists classify females as a minority group. Because females outnumber males, you may think this strange, but since this term refers to people who are discriminated against on the basis of physical or cultural characteristics, this concept applies to females (Hacker 1951). For an overview of gender discrimination in a changing society, see the Perspectives box on page 290.

Illiteracy in 15 Least Industrialized Nations, by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Violence against women has taken many forms throughout history. One of the most ferocious was suttee, in which a living widow was cremated with her dead husband. This painting by Aldo Torchio depicts the riot that ensued at Rajadhar, India, in 1831 when the British police tried to prevent a suttee.
Female circumcision is common in 26 African countries and in some parts of Malaysia and Indonesia. This custom, often called female genital mutilation (FGM) by Westerners, is also known as clitoral excision, clitoridectomy, infibulation, and labi- adectomy, depending largely on how much of the tissue is removed. In Egypt, 3,600 girls are circumcised each day. Worldwide, between 100 million and 200 million females have been circumcised.

In some cultures only the girl's clitoris is cut off, in others the clitoris and both the labia majora and the labia minora. The Nubia in the Sudan cut away most of the girl's genitalia, then sew together the remaining outer edges with silk or catgut. The girl's legs are bound from ankles to waist for several weeks while scar tissue closes up the vagina almost completely. A small opening the diameter of a matchstick or a pencil is left for the passage of urine and menstrual fluids. In East Africa the vaginal opening is not sutured shut, but the clitoris and both sets of labia are cut off.

Among most groups, the surgery takes place between the ages of 4 and 8. In some cultures it occurs seven to ten days after birth, while in others it is not performed until girls reach adolescence. Often done without anesthesia, the pain is so excruciating that adults must hold the girl down. In urban areas, the operation is sometimes performed by physicians; in rural areas, it usually is performed by a neighborhood woman. To stop the bleeding, the rural Masai of Kenya cleanse the wound with cow urine and smother it in goat fat (Welsh 1995).

Some of the risks are shock, extensive bleeding, infection, infertility, and death. Ongoing complications include vaginal spasms, painful intercourse, and lack of orgasms. The tiny opening makes urination and menstruation difficult. Frequent urinary tract infections result from urine and menstrual fluid building up behind the little opening.

When the woman marries, the opening is cut wider to permit sexual intercourse. In some groups, this is the husband's responsibility. Before a woman gives birth, the opening is enlarged further. After birth, the vagina is again sutured shut, a cycle of surgically closing and opening that begins anew with each birth.

Marie Montana (1997) states, “In some societies that practice the custom, a woman is considered impure and is not allowed to marry. Grandmothers insist that the custom continue out of concern that their granddaughters marry well. Some immigrants to the United States have taken their daughters back to the homeland for the operation, while others pooled their money and flew to an excisor who performed the surgery on several girls. In 1997, the United States passed a law that makes arranging or performing female circumcision punishable by up to five years in prison.

What are the reasons for this custom? Some groups believe that it reduces female sexual desire, thus making it more likely that a woman will be a virgin until marriage, and, afterward, remain faithful to her husband. Others believe that it enhances female fertility, prevents the clitoris from getting infected, and enhances vaginal cleanliness.

Feminists, who call female circumcision a form of ritual torture to control female sexuality, point out that the societies that practice it are male dominated. Mothers cooperate with the circumcision because in these societies an unmarried woman has virtually no rights, and an uncircumcised woman is considered impure and is not allowed to marry. Grandmothers insist that the custom continue out of concern that their granddaughters marry well.

Some immigrants to the United States have taken their daughters back to the homeland for the operation, while others pooled their money and flew to an excisor who performed the surgery on several girls. In 1997, the United States passed a law that makes arranging or performing female circumcision punishable by up to five years in prison.

For Your Consideration

Do you think that Western nations should try to make other nations stop this custom? Or would this be ethnocentric, the imposition of Western values on other cultures? As one Somali woman said, “The Somali woman doesn't need an alien woman telling her how to treat her private parts.” What legitimate basis do you think there is for members of one culture to interfere with another?

What is the origin of discrimination against women? Let's consider a popular theory. It assumes that patriarchy is universal and, accordingly, to explain its origin it looks to universal conditions—biological factors coupled with social factors.

Childbirth and Social Experiences

This theory points to social consequences of the biology of human reproduction (Lerner 1986; Friedl 1990). In early human history, life was short and to reproduce the human group many children had to be born. Because only females get pregnant, carry a child nine months, give birth, and nurse, women were limited in activities for a considerable part of their lives. To survive, an infant needed a nursing mother. With a child at her breast or in her uterus, or one carried on her hip or on her back, women were physically encumbered. Consequently, around the world women assumed tasks associated with the home and child care, while men took over the hunting of large animals and other tasks that required greater speed and absence from the base camp for longer periods of time (Huber 1990).

As a consequence, males became dominant. It was the men who left camp to hunt animals, who made contact with other tribes, who traded with these other groups, and who quarreled and waged war with them. It was also men who made and controlled the instruments of death, the weapons used for hunting and warfare. It was they who accumulated possessions in trade, and gained prestige by triumphantly returning with prisoners of war or with large animals to feed the tribe. In contrast, little prestige was given to the ordinary, routine, taken-for-granted activities of women—who were not seen as risking their lives for the group. Eventually, men took over society. Their weapons, items of trade, and knowledge gained from contact with other groups became sources of power. Women were transformed into second-class citizens, subject to men's decisions.

WebLink

WEBLINK
Evaluating the Theory

Is this theory correct? Remember that the answer lies buried in human history, and there is no way of testing it. Male dominance may be due to some entirely different cause. For example, anthropologist Marvin Harris proposed that because most men are stronger than most women and hand-to-hand combat was necessary in tribal groups, men became the warriors and women the reward to entice them to do battle. Frederick Engels proposed that patriarchy (male dominance of a society) developed with the origin of private property (Lerner 1986). He could not explain why private property should have produced patriarchy, however. Gerda Lerner (1986) suggests that patriarchy may even have had different origins in different places. And as we reviewed earlier in this chapter (pages 283–286), some sociologists argue that biology is the cause.

Whatever its origins, a circular system of thought evolved. Men developed notions of their own inherent superiority—based on the evidence of their dominant position in society. They then consolidated their power, enshrouded many of their activities with secrecy, and constructed elaborate rules and rituals to avoid “contamination” by the females, whom they now openly deemed inferior. Even today, patriarchy is always surrounded with cultural supports to justify male dominance.

As tribal societies developed into larger groups, men, enjoying their power and privileges, maintained their dominance. Long after hunting and hand-to-hand combat ceased to be routine, and even after large numbers of children were no longer needed to reproduce the human group, men held onto their power. Male dominance in contemporary societies, then, is a continuation of a millennia-old pattern whose origin is lost in history.
Rather than some accidental hit-or-miss affair, the institutions of each society work together to maintain the group's particular forms of inequality. Custom, venerated by history, both justifies and maintains arrangements of gender inequality. Although men have resisted sharing their privileged positions with women, change has come.

Fighting Back: The Rise of Feminism

To see how far we have come, it is useful to see where we used to be. In early U.S. society, the second-class status of women was taken for granted. A husband and wife were legally one person—him (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986). Women who worked for wages could not even collect their own paychecks—single women were often required to hand them over to their fathers; married women, to their husbands. Women could not serve on juries, nor could they vote, make legal contracts, or hold property in their own name. These conditions were generally seen as part of the proper relations of the sexes. How could times have changed so much that such conditions sound like fiction?

A central lesson of conflict theory is that power yields tremendous privilege; that, like a magnet, it draws to the elite the best resources available. Because men held tenaciously onto their privileges and used social institutions to maintain their position, basic rights for women came only through prolonged and bitter struggle (Offen 1990).

Feminism, the view that biology is not destiny, and, therefore, stratification by gender is wrong and should be resisted, met strong opposition—both by men who had privilege to lose and by many women who accepted their status as morally correct. In the United States, for example, women had to directly confront men, who first denied them the right to speak and then ridiculed them when they persisted in speaking in public. Leaders of the feminist movement, then known as suffragists, chained themselves to posts and to the iron grillwork of public buildings—and then went on protesting while the police sawed them loose. When imprisoned, they continued to protest by going on hunger strikes. Threatened by such determination and confrontations, men spat on demonstrators for daring to question their place, slapped their faces, tripped them, pelted them with burning cigar stubs, and hurled obscenities at them (Cowley 1969).

In 1916, feminists founded the National Women’s Party. In January 1917, they threw a picket line around the White House. After picketing continuously for six months, the pickets were arrested. Declaring their fines unjust, the women refused to pay them. Hundreds went to prison, including Lucy Burns and Alice Paul, two leaders of the National Women’s Party. The extent to which these women had threatened male prerogatives is demonstrated by their treatment in prison.

Two men brought in Dorothy Day, [the editor of a periodical that espoused women’s rights], twisting her arms above her head. Suddenly they lifted her and brought her body down twice over the back of an iron bench. . . . They had been there a few minutes when Mrs. Lewis, all doubled over like a sack of flour, was thrown in. Her head struck the iron bed and she fell to the floor senseless. As for Lucy Burns, they handcuffed her wrists and fastened the handcuffs over head to the cell door. (Cowley 1969)

This “first wave” of the women’s movement had a conservative branch that concentrated on winning the vote for women and a radical branch that wanted to reform all the institutions of society (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986). Both groups worked toward winning the right to vote, but after the vote was won in 1920 the movement was left with no unifying goal. The smaller radical group launched a relentless campaign to pass an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution, while the dominant conservative group founded the nonpartisan League of Women Voters (Taylor 1997). The movement, however, basically disappeared from public consciousness.
The “second wave” began in the 1960s. Sociologist Janet Chafetz (1990) points out that up to this time most women thought of work as a temporary activity to fill the time between completing school and getting married. When larger numbers of women began to work, however, they began to compare their working conditions with those of men. This shift in reference group created a different view of working conditions, launching a “second wave” of protest and struggle against gender inequalities. The goals of this second wave are broad—from changing work roles to changing policies on violence against women.

This second wave of the women’s movement is also broken into liberal and conservative factions. Although each holds a different picture of what gender equality should look like, they share several goals, including nondiscrimination in job opportunities and pay. Both liberals and conservatives have a radical wing. The radicals on the liberal side call for hostility toward men, while radicals on the conservative side call for a return to traditional family roles. All factions—whether radical or conservative—claim to represent the “real” needs of today’s women. It is from these claims and counterclaims that the women’s movement will continue to take shape and affect public policy.

Although women enjoy fundamental rights today, gender inequality continues to play a central role in social life. In some instances, it can even be a life-and-death matter, as with the medical situations discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page. Let’s look at gender relations in education and everyday life, and then, in greater detail, at discrimination in the world of work.

**Gender Inequality in Education**

In education, too, a glimpse of the past sheds light on the present. About a century ago, leading educators claimed that women’s wombs dominated their minds. This made higher education a burden on women’s frail capacities. Dr. Edward Clarke, of Harvard University’s medical faculty, expressed the dominant sentiment this way:

> A girl upon whom Nature, for a limited period and for a definite purpose, imposes so great a physiological task, will not have as much power left for the tasks of school, as the boy of whom Nature requires less at the corresponding epoch.
> (Andersen 1988)

Because women were so much weaker, Clarke urged them to study only one-third as much as young men—and not to study at all during menstruation.
Over the years, the situation gradually improved, but discrimination persisted. Through the 1960s, for example, girls were barred from attending shop classes, which were reserved for boys. Instead, they were routed to home economics, considered appropriate for their station in life. Today, women’s sports are often underfunded. As a parenthetical note, whenever I attend high school football games, I still see an organized group of girls in short, brightly colored skirts wildly cheering the boys from the sidelines—but no such group of boys leading organized cheers for the girls as they play their sports.

The situation has so changed from what it used to be, however, that some measures of education make it look as though discrimination may be directed against males. For example, more women than men are enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, and women now earn 55 percent of all bachelor’s degrees (Statistical Abstract 1997:Table 300, 303). As Figure 11.1 shows, women also complete their bachelor’s degrees faster than men.

Probing below the surface, however, reveals that degrees follow gender, thus reinforcing male–female distinctions. Men earn 85 percent of bachelor’s degrees in the “masculine” field of engineering, while women are awarded 90 percent of bachelor’s degrees in the “feminine” field of nursing (Digest of Education Statistics 1996:Table 244). Because gender socialization gives men and women different orientations to life, they enter college with gender-linked aspirations. It is this socialization—rather than any presumed innate characteristics—that channels them into different educational paths.

If we follow students into graduate school, we see that with each passing year the proportion of women decreases. Table 11.2 gives us a snapshot of doctoral programs in the sciences. Note how aspirations (enrollment) and accomplishments (doctorates earned) are sex linked. In all but one of these doctoral programs, men outnumber women, and in all of them women are less likely to complete the doctorate. It is significant that the four programs women are least likely to complete have come to be considered masculine endeavors.

Medical researchers were perplexed. Reports were coming in from all over the country indicating that women, who live longer than men, were twice as likely to die after coronary bypass surgery. Researchers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles checked their own hospital’s records. They found that of almost 2,300 coronary bypass patients, 4.6 percent of the women died as a result of the surgery, compared with only 2.6 percent of the men.

These findings presented a sociological puzzle. To solve it, medical researchers first turned to an answer based on biology. In coronary bypass surgery, a blood vessel is taken from one part of the body and stitched to a coronary artery on the surface of the heart. Perhaps this operation was more difficult to perform on women because of their smaller coronary arteries. To find out, researchers measured the amount of time that surgeons kept patients on the heart–lung machine while they operated. They were surprised to learn that women spent less time on the machine than men, indicating that the operation was not more difficult to perform on women.

As the researchers probed, a surprising answer unfolded—unintended sexual discrimination. Referring physicians had not taken the chest pains of their women patients as seriously as those of their men patients. Physicians, it turned out, were ten times more likely to give men exercise stress tests and radioactive heart scans. They also sent men to surgery on the basis of abnormal stress tests but waited until women showed clear-cut symptoms of coronary heart disease before sending them to surgery. Being referred for surgery after the disease is further along decreases the chances of survival.

Other researchers wondered if the sex of the physician matters when it comes to ordering Pap smears and mammography. They examined the records of 98,000 patients and found that it does make a difference—women physicians are much more likely to order these screening tests.

For Your Consideration

In short, gender bias is so pervasive that it operates beneath our level of awareness and so severe that it can even be a matter of life or death. It is important to note that the doctors are unaware that they are discriminating. They have no intentions to do so. In what ways does gender bias affect your own perceptions and behavior?

Sources: Based on Bishop 1990; Lurie et al. 1993.
If we follow those who earn doctoral degrees back into colleges and universities, we find gender stratification in both prestige and income. Throughout the United States, women are less likely to be full professors, the highest, most prestigious rank. It is important also to note that full professors are paid more than the lower ranks (instructor, assistant professor, and associate professor). To see the extent of the stratification, we can note that even when women are full professors, they average less pay than men who are full professors (DePalma 1993).

Some encouraging changes are taking place in higher education. Although we are still a long way from equality, as Figure 11.2 on the next page illustrates, the proportion of professional degrees earned by women has increased sharply. The greatest change is in dentistry: In 1970 across the entire United States, only 34 women earned this degree. Today that annual total is almost 1,500 (Statistical Abstract 1997:Table 307).

If we follow those who earn doctoral degrees back into colleges and universities, we find gender stratification in both prestige and income. Throughout the United States, women are less likely to be full professors, the highest, most prestigious rank. It is important also to note that full professors are paid more than the lower ranks (instructor, assistant professor, and associate professor). To see the extent of the stratification, we can note that even when women are full professors, they average less pay than men who are full professors (DePalma 1993).

Some encouraging changes are taking place in higher education. Although we are still a long way from equality, as Figure 11.2 on the next page illustrates, the proportion of professional degrees earned by women has increased sharply. The greatest change is in dentistry: In 1970 across the entire United States, only 34 women earned this degree. Today that annual total is almost 1,500 (Statistical Abstract 1997:Table 307).

### TABLE 11.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Students Enrolled in Doctoral Programs</th>
<th>Doctorates Conferred</th>
<th>Completion Ratio(^a) (higher or lower than expected)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer sciences</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological sciences</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical sciences</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)The difference between the proportion enrolled in a program and the proportion granted doctorates divided by the proportion enrolled in the program.

Gender Inequality in Everyday Life

Of the many aspects of gender discrimination in everyday life that could be examined, we have space to look only at two: the general devaluation of femininity in U.S. society and male dominance of conversation.

General Devaluation of Things Feminine

Leaning against the water cooler, two men—both minor executives—are nursing their cups of coffee, discussing last Sunday’s Giants game, postponing for as long as possible the moment when work must finally be faced.

A vice president walks by and hears them talking about sports. Does he stop and send them back to their desks? Does he frown? Probably not. Being a man, he is far more likely to pause and join in the conversation, anxious to prove that he, too, is “one of the boys,” feigning an interest in football that he may very well not share at all. These men—all men in the office—are his troops, his comrades-in-arms.

Now, let’s assume that two women are standing by the water cooler discussing whatever you please: women’s liberation, clothes, work, any subject—except football, of course. The vice president walks by, sees them, and moves down the hall in a fury, cursing and wondering whether it is worth the trouble to complain—but to whom?—about all those bitches standing around gabbing when they should be working. “Don’t they know,” he will ask, in the words of a million men, “that this is an office?” (Korda 1973:20–21)

As indicated in this scenario, women’s capacities, interests, attitudes, and contributions are not taken as seriously as those of men. Masculinity is valued more highly, for it represents success and strength; while femininity is devalued, for it is perceived as failure and weakness (Schur 1984).

During World War II, sociologist Samuel Stouffer noted the general devaluation of things feminine. In his classic study of combat soldiers, The American Soldier, Stouffer reported that officers used feminine terms as insults to motivate soldiers (1949). To show less-than-expected courage or endurance was to risk the charge of not being a man. An officer might say, “What’s matter, Bud—got lace on your drawers?” A generation later, to prepare soldiers to fight in Vietnam accusations of femininity were still used as motivating insults. Drill sergeants would mock their troops by saying, “Can’t hack it, little girls?” (Eisenhart 1975). In the Marines, the worst insult to male recruits is to compare their performance to a woman’s (Gilham 1989).
The same phenomenon occurs in sports. Sociologist Douglas Foley (1997) notes that football coaches insult boys who don’t play well by saying that they are “wearing skirts,” and sociologists Jean Stockard and Miriam Johnson (1980), who observed boys playing basketball, heard boys who missed a basket called a “woman.” This pattern continues in professional sports, and hockey players who are not rough enough on the ice are called “girls” (Gallmeier 1988:227).

This name-calling is sociologically significant. As Stockard and Johnson (1980:12) point out, such insults embody a generalized devaluation of females in U.S. society. As they noted, “There is no comparable phenomenon among women, for young girls do not insult each other by calling each other ‘man.’ ”

Gender Inequality in Conversation. As you may have noticed in your own life, gender inequality also shows up in everyday talk. Because men are more likely to interrupt a conversation and to control changes in topics, sociologists have noted that talk between a man and a woman is often more like talk between an employer and an employee than between social equals (Hall 1984; West and Garcia 1988; Smith-Lovin and Brody 1989; Tannen 1990). Even in college, men interrupt their instructors more often than do women, especially if the instructor is a woman (Brooks 1982). In short, conversations between men and women mirror their relative positions of power in society.

Derogatory terms and conversation represent only the tip of the iceberg, however, for underlying these aspects of everyday life is a structural inequality based on gender that runs throughout society. Let’s examine that structural feature in the workplace.

Gender Relations in the Workplace

To examine the work setting is to make visible basic relations between men and women. Let’s begin with one of the most remarkable areas of gender inequality at work, the pay gap.

The Pay Gap

Since 1890, the U.S. government has tracked the percentages of men and women in the work force. From Figure 11.3, you can see that in 1890 about one of every five workers was a woman and that with each passing year women have made up a larger proportion of the U.S. labor force. The exception occurred immediately after World War II when

Figure 11.3
Women’s and Men’s Proportion of the U.S. Labor Force

Note: Pre-1940 figures include women 14 and over; figures for 1940 and after are for women 16 and over.

* Estimated

millions of women left factories and offices to return home as full-time wives and mothers. Today, for every ten men workers, there are nine women workers.

The chances are that you are going to be one of these workers. How would you like to earn an extra $800,000 on your job? If this sounds appealing, read on. I'm going to reveal how you can average an extra $20,000 a year between the ages of 25 and 65.

Is this hard to do? All you have to do is be a man (see Figure 11.4). Comparing workers who have bachelor's degrees, this is precisely how much more the average man will earn. Hardly any single factor pinpoints gender discrimination better than this total. From Figure 11.4, you also can see that this gender gap in earnings shows up at all levels of education.

Figure 11.5 shows the overall pay gap for year-round, full-time U.S. workers in all fields. You can see that women's wages average only about 66 percent of men's. Until 1985 women's earnings hovered between 58 and 61 percent of men's, so being paid only two-thirds of what men make is actually an improvement. A gender pay gap characterizes all industrialized nations, but only in Japan is the gap larger than in the United States (Blau and Kahn 1992).

If we look at how the pay gap compares by race-ethnicity, we are in for a few surprises. As Figure 11.6 shows, African-American women and Latinas come the closest to earning what men of their groups make. Then come Asian Americans, followed in last place by whites.

This figure is deceptive, however, for it makes it look as if African-American women and Latinas earn more than white women, which they do not. They simply earn a larger proportion of what men in their groups earn. Because the men in these groups average less than whites, so do the women. Asian-American women are relatively well off, for they make a higher-than-average percentage of men who also earn more than average. We shall have more to say on this in the next chapter, but if you want to jump ahead, look at Table 12.1 on page 331.

What logic can underlie the gender pay gap? Earlier we saw that college degrees are gender linked, so perhaps this gap is due to career choices. Maybe women tend to choose lower-paying jobs, such as grade school teaching, whereas men are more likely to go into better-paying fields, such as business and engineering. Actually, this is true, and researchers have found that about half the pay gap is due to such factors. The balance, however, is due to gender discrimination (Kemp 1990).
Depending on your sex, then, you are likely either to benefit from gender discrimination—or to be its victim. Because the pay gap will be so important in your own work life, let's follow some college graduates to see how it takes place. Economists Rex Fuller and Richard Schoenberger (1991) examined the starting salaries of the business majors at the University of Wisconsin, of whom 47 percent were women. They found that the women averaged 11 percent ($1,737) lower pay.

You might be able to think of valid reasons for this initial pay gap. For example, the women might have been less qualified. Perhaps their grades were lower. Or maybe they did fewer internships. If so, they would deserve lower salaries. To find out, Fuller and Schoenberger reviewed the students’ college records. To their surprise, it turned out that the women had earned higher grades and done more internships than the men. In other words, if women were equally qualified, they were offered lower salaries—and if they were more highly qualified, they were offered lower salaries—a classic lose–lose situation.

What happened after these graduates were on the job? Did these starting salaries wash out, so that after a few years the men and women earned about the same? To find out, Fuller and Schoenberger checked their salaries five years later. Instead of narrowing, the pay gap had grown even wider. By this time, the women earned 14 percent ($3,615) less than the men.

As a final indication of the extent of the gender pay gap, consider this. I examined the names of the CEOs of the 350 largest U.S. corporations, and not one of them is a woman. Your best chance to reach the top is to be named—in this order—John, Robert, James, William, or Charles. Edward, Lawrence, and Richard are also advantageous. Amber, Candace, Leticia, and María, however, apparently draw a severe penalty.
The Glass Ceiling or the Glass Escalator?

The Glass Ceiling. What keeps women from breaking through the glass ceiling, the mostly invisible barrier that keeps women from reaching the executive suite? Researchers have identified a “pipeline” that leads to the top—marketing, sales, and production—positions that directly add to the corporate bottom line (Reich 1995). Stereotyped as better at “support,” women often are steered into human resources or public relations. There successful projects are not appreciated the same as those that bring in corporate profits—and bonuses for their managers. Felice Schwartz, founder of Catalyst, an organization that focuses on women’s issues in the workplace, put it this way: Men, who dominate the executive suite, stereotype potential leaders as people who look like themselves (Lopez 1992).

Another reason that the glass ceiling is so powerful is that women lack mentors, successful executives who take an interest in them and teach them the ropes. Some men executives fear gossip and sexual harassment charges if they get close to a woman in a subordinate position. Others don’t mentor women because of stereotypes of women as weak (Lancaster 1995; Reich 1995). To lack a mentor is no trivial matter, for supposedly all top executives have had a coach or mentor (Lancaster 1995).

The glass ceiling is cracking, however, and more women are reaching the executive suite (Lublin 1996). A look at women above the glass ceiling reveals highly motivated women with a fierce competitive spirit who are willing to give up sleep and recreation for the sake of career advancement. They also learn to play by “men’s rules,” developing a style that makes men comfortable. In the background of about three-fourths of the women at the top is a supportive husband who shares household duties and adapts his career to the needs of his executive wife.

The Glass Escalator. Sociologist Christine Williams (1995) interviewed men and women who worked as nurses, elementary school teachers, librarians, and social workers. She found that the men in these traditionally women’s occupations, instead of bumping into a glass ceiling, had climbed aboard a glass escalator. That is, compared with women the men were accelerated into more desirable work assignments, higher-level positions, and larger salaries. The motor that drives the glass escalator is gender, the stereotype that because someone is male he is more capable.
The “Mommy Track”

Wives are more likely than husbands to be the caretakers of the marriage, to nurture it through the hard times. Most wives also take greater responsibility for taking care of the children, for maintaining family ties (such as sending greeting cards), and spend considerably more time doing housework. Consequently, most employed wives face greater role conflict than do their husbands.

To help resolve this conflict, Felice Schwartz (1989) suggested that corporations offer women a choice of two parallel career paths. The “fast track” consists of the high-powered, demanding positions that may require sixty or seventy hours of work per week—regular responsibilities, emergencies, out-of-town meetings, and a briefcase jammed with work at night and on weekends. With such limited time outside of work, family life often suffers. Women can choose this “fast track” if they wish. Or instead they may choose a “mommy track,” which would stress both career and family. Less would be expected of a woman on the “mommy track,” for her commitment to the firm would be lower and her commitment to her family higher.

That, of course, say critics, is exactly what is wrong with this proposal. A “mommy track” will encourage women to be satisfied with lower aspirations and fewer promotions and confirm men’s stereotypes of women executives. Because there is no “daddy track,” it also assumes that child rearing is primarily women’s work (Starrels 1992). To encourage women to slow up in the race to climb the corporate ladder would perpetuate, or even increase, the executive pay gap. The “mommy track,” conclude critics, would keep men in executive power and relegate women to an inferior position in corporate life.

Schwartz replies that what she is really proposing is a “zigzag track” (Shellenbarger 1995b). “In my ideal world,” she says, “people, including men, would slow down during a period when their kids were small. Later they would be readmitted to the mainstream. If you choose this intermittent route upward, you would make it to the top more slowly than someone equally able who took the straight vertical route. The goal,” she adds, “is to balance family and career.”

Critics suggest that a better way to confront the conflict between work and family is for husbands to take greater responsibilities at home and for firms to provide on-site daycare, flexible work schedules, and parental leave without loss of benefits (Auerbach 1990; Galinsky and Stein 1990). Others maintain that the choice between family and career is artificial, that there are ample role models of family-oriented, highly successful women from Sandra Day O’Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, to Ann Fisher, astronaut and physician (Ferguson and Dunphy 1991).

Parenting and work often bring conflict, some of which we shall examine in Chapter 16. For a controversy surrounding motherhood that has been ushered in by technology, see the box on the next page.

Sexual Harassment

Until the 1970s, women considered it a personal matter when they experienced unwanted sexual comments, touches, looks, or pressure to have sex. The term sexual harassment, referring to these activities, especially in occupational or school settings, was unknown. Then in 1979, Catharine MacKinnon, an activist lawyer, published a book that forever changed our way of thinking. MacKinnon stressed that such unwanted sexual advances are a structural problem; that is, they are built into the social structure. It is not a case of a man here and a man there doing obnoxious things because they are attracted to a woman: Rather, it is a case of men abusing their positions of authority to force unwanted sexual activities on women.

As symbolic interactionists stress, language is dynamic. It not only reflects our experiences in life, but also changes our perceptions of those experiences. Today, because we have this term, we see the same behaviors in a different light from the way our predecessors saw them.
With changes in the work force that we just reviewed, women also have become sexual harassers. One study in 1981 and another in 1992 found that 15 percent of men workers had been sexually harassed (Merit Systems Protection Board 1981; Lawlor 1994). Male victims are less likely than female victims to receive a sympathetic ear, for people tend to find their situations humorous, sort of like a boy’s dream come true. Like women victims, however, these men also report that they feel powerless and used. Social norms and symbolic perceptions, I assume, will catch up eventually to this changing reality of women abusing power and men as victims.

Like other dynamic terms in our language, this one, too, continues to undergo shifts. For example, as the box on the next page explores, the line between sexual harassment and rape becomes blurred.

### Gender and Violence

The high rate of violence in the United States shocks foreigners and frightens many Americans. Only a couple of generations ago, many Americans left their homes and cars unlocked. Today, fearful of carjackings, they even lock their cars while driving, and, fearful of rape and kidnappings, escort their children to school. Lurking behind these fears is gender inequality of violence—that females are most likely to be victims of males, not the other way around. Let’s briefly review this almost one-way street in gender violence.
Violence Against Women

On pages 288–289, we examined violence against women in other cultures. Here, due to space limitations, we can review only briefly the primary features of violence against U.S. women.

Rape. Rape has become so common in the United States that each year almost 1 of every 1,000 females 12 years of age and over is raped. Rapists are almost exclusively young males. Although males aged 15 to 24 make up about 15 percent of the U.S. male population, about 34 percent of those arrested for rape are in this age group (FBI Uniform Crime Reports 1994:Table 39, Statistical Abstract 1997:Table 16).

Date Rape. What has shocked so many about date rape (also known as acquaintance rape) are studies showing that it is not an isolated event here and there. For example, about 21 percent of women taking the introductory psychology courses at Texas A&M University reported that they had been forced to have sexual intercourse. Date rape most commonly occurs not between relative strangers on first dates, but between couples who have known each other about a year (Muehlenhard and Linton 1987). Most date rapes go unreported. Those that are reported are difficult to prosecute, for juries tend to believe that if a woman knows the accused she wasn’t “really” raped (Bourque 1989).
Murder. Table 11.3 summarizes U.S. patterns of murder and gender. Note that although females make up about 51 percent of the U.S. population, they don’t even come close to making up 51 percent of the nation’s killers. Note also that almost one-fourth of all murder victims are female—and their killers are almost always male.

Violence in the Home. Spouse battering, marital rape, and incest are discussed in Chapter 16, pages 456–458. A particular form of violence against women, genital circumcision, is the focus of the Perspectives box on page 289.

A Feminist Understanding of Gender Patterns in Violence

Feminist sociologists have been especially effective in bringing violence against women to the public’s attention. Some see symbolic interactionism, pointing out that to associate strength and virility with violence—as is done in so many areas of U.S. culture—is to produce violence. Others use conflict theory. They argue that as gender relations change, males are losing power, and that some males become violent against females as a way to reassert their declining power and status.

Solutions

There is no magic bullet for this problem, but to be effective any solution must break the connection between violence and masculinity. This would require an educational program that incorporates school, churches, homes, and the media. Given such aspects of U.S. history as gun-slinging heroes of the West, and current messages in the mass media, it is difficult to be optimistic that a change will come soon.

Our next topic, women in politics, however, gives us much more reason for optimism.

The Changing Face of Politics

What do these nations have in common?

- Canada in North America
- Argentina, Bolivia, and Nicaragua in Latin America
- Britain, France, Ireland, and Portugal in western Europe
- The Philippines in Asia
- Israel in the Mideast
- Poland in eastern Europe
- India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka on the subcontinent

The answer is that all have had a woman president or prime minister. To this list we can add even such bastions of male chauvinism as Haiti, Turkey, and Bangladesh (Harwood and Brooks 1993).

Then why not the United States? Why don’t women, who outnumber men, take political control of the nation? Eight million more women than men are of voting age, and more women than men vote in U.S. national elections. As Table 11.4 shows, however, women are greatly outnumbered by men in political office. In spite of the political gains women have made in recent elections, since 1789 about 1,800 men have served in the U.S. Senate, but only 24 women, including the nine current senators. Not until 1992 was the...
The reasons for women’s underrepresentation? First, women are still underrepresented in law and business, the careers from which most politicians come. Further, most women do not perceive themselves as a class of people who need bloc political action in order to overcome domination. Most women also find the irregular hours needed to run for office incompatible with their role as mothers. Fathers, in contrast, whose ordinary roles are more likely to take them away from home, do not feel this same conflict. Women are also less likely to have a supportive spouse who is willing to play an unassuming background role while providing solace, encouragement, child care, and voter appeal. Finally, preferring to hold tightly onto their positions of power, men have been reluctant to incorporate women into centers of decision making or to present them as viable candidates.

These factors are changing, however, and we can expect more women to seek and gain political office. As we saw in Figure 11.2 (on page 296), more women are going into law, where they are doing more traveling and making statewide and national contacts. The same is true for business. Increasingly, child care is seen as a mutual responsibility of both mother and father. And in some areas, such as my own political district, party heads are searching for qualified candidates (read “people with voter appeal and without skeletons in their closets”), without regard to sex. The primary concern in at least some areas today is not gender, but whether a candidate can win. This generation, then, is likely to mark a fundamental change in women’s political participation, and it appears only a matter of time until a woman occupies the Oval Office.

Playing a fuller role in the decision-making processes of our social institutions, women are breaking the stereotypes and role models that lock males into exclusively male activities and push females into roles considered feminine. As structural barriers fall and more activities become degenderized, both males and females will be free to pursue activities more compatible with their abilities and desires as individuals.

As sociologists Janet Chafetz (1974), Janet Giele (1978), and Judith Lorber (1994) have pointed out, the ultimate possibility is a new conception of the human personality. At present structural obstacles, accompanied by supporting socialization and stereotypes, cast most males and females into fairly rigid molds along the lines that culture dictates. To overcome these obstacles and abandon traditional stereotypes is to give males and females new perceptions of themselves and one another. Both females and males will then be free to feel and to express needs and emotions that present social arrangements deny them. Females are likely to perceive themselves as more in control of their environment and to explore this aspect of the human personality. Males are likely to feel and to express more emotional sensitivity—to be warmer, more affectionate and tender, and to give greater expression to anxieties and stresses that their gender now forces them to suppress. In the future we may discover that such “greater wholeness” of males and females entails many other dimensions of the human personality.

As they develop a new consciousness of themselves and of their own potential, relationships between women and men will change. Certainly distinctions between the sexes
will not disappear. There is no reason, however, for biological differences to be translated into social inequalities. The reasonable goal is appreciation of sexual differences coupled with equality of opportunity—which may well lead to a transformed society (Gillman 1911; Offen 1990). If so, as sociologist Alison Jaggar (1990) observed, gender equality can become less a goal than a background condition for living in society.

Summary and Review

Issues of Sex and Gender

What is gender stratification?
The term gender stratification refers to unequal access to power, prestige, and property on the basis of sex. Each society establishes a structure that, on the basis of sex and gender, opens and closes access to the group’s privileges. Pp. 282–283.

How do sex and gender differ?
Sex refers to biological distinctions between males and females. It consists of both primary and secondary sex characteristics. Gender, in contrast, is what a society considers proper behaviors and attitudes for its male and female members. Sex physically distinguishes males from females; gender defines what is “masculine” and “feminine.” P. 283.

Why do the behaviors of males and females differ?
In the “nature versus nurture” debate—whether differences between the behaviors of males and females are caused by inherited (biological) or learned (cultural) characteristics—almost all sociologists take the side of nurture. In recent years, however, the door to biology has opened somewhat. Pp. 283–286.

Gender Inequality in Global Perspective

Is gender stratification universal?
George Murdock surveyed information on premodern societies and found not only that all of them have sex-linked activities, but also that all of them give greater prestige to male activities. Patriarchy, or male dominance, does appear to be universal. Besides work, other areas of discrimination include education, politics, and violence. Pp. 287–288.

Gender Inequalities in Theoretical Perspective

How did females become a minority group?
The main theory that attempts to explain how females became a minority group in their own societies focuses on the physical limitations imposed by childbirth. The origins of this discrimination, however, are lost in history, and no one knows for sure how this discrimination began. Pp. 288–292.

Gender Inequality in the United States

Is the feminist movement new?
In what is called the “first wave,” feminists made political demands for change in the early 1900s—and were met with much hostility, and even violence. The “second wave” began in the 1960s and continues today. Pp. 292–293.

What forms does gender stratification in education take?
Although more women than men now attend college, each tends to select “feminine” or “masculine” fields. In addition, men outnumber women in all but two scientific fields. Change is indicated by the growing numbers of women in such fields as law and medicine. Pp. 293–296.

Is there gender inequality in everyday life?
Two indications of gender inequality in everyday life are the general devaluation of femininity and the male dominance of conversation. Pp. 296–297.

Gender Relations in the Workplace

What gender inequality is there in the workplace?
Over the last century, women have made up an increasing proportion of the work force. Nonetheless, the gender gap in pay characterizes all occupations. For college graduates, the lifetime pay gap runs about $800,000 in favor of men. Sexual harassment also continues to be a reality of the workplace. Pp. 297–307.

Gender and Violence

What forms does violence against women take?
The victims of battering, rape, incest, and murder overwhelmingly are females. Female circumcision is a special case of violence against females. Conflict theorists point out that men use violence to maintain their power. Pp. 302–304.
The Changing Face of Politics

What is the trend in gender inequality in politics?
A strict division of gender roles—women as child care providers and housekeepers, men as workers outside the home—has traditionally kept women out of politics. Although women continue to be underrepresented in U.S. politics, the trend toward greater political equality is firmly in place. Pp. 304–305.

Glimpsing the Future—with Hope

What progress has been made in reducing gender inequality?
In the United States, women are playing a fuller role in the decision-making processes of our social institutions. Men, too, are reexamining their traditional roles. The ultimate possibility of gender equality is a new conception of the human personality, one that allows both males and females to pursue their individual interests unfettered by gender. Pp. 305–306.

Where can I read more on this topic?
Suggested readings for this chapter are listed on page 663.