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## SEX VERSUS GENDER

### Is It a Boy or a Girl?



On April 27, 1966, identical 8-month-old twin boys were brought to a hospital in the city of Winnipeg, Canada, to be circumcised. An electrical cauterizing needle—a device used to seal blood vessels as it cuts—was used for the procedure. However, due either to equipment malfunction or doctor error, the needle entirely burned off one baby’s penis. The parents desperately sought medical advice. No matter whom they consulted, they were given the same prognosis. As one psychiatrist summed up baby John’s future: “He will be unable to consummate marriage or have normal heterosexual relations; he will have to recognize that he is incomplete, physically defective, and that he must live apart . . .” (quoted in Colapinto, 1997: 58).

One evening, 7 months after the accident, the parents, now deeply depressed, were watching TV. They heard Dr. John Money, a psychologist from Johns Hopkins Medical School in Baltimore, say that he could *assign* babies a male or female identity. Money had successfully tested his idea on **hermaphrodites**, babies born with ambiguous genitals due to a hormone imbalance in the womb. For example, he argued that a boy born with a penis shorter than 1 inch should undergo surgery to remove the male genitals and construct a vagina. Immediately after surgery, the parents should treat the baby as a girl. They should never reveal her sexual status at birth. They should arrange for her to take regular doses of the female hormone, estrogen, beginning at puberty. The baby would then grow up to think of herself as a girl.

Until baby John, Money had never tested his idea on a child born unambiguously a boy or a girl. Therefore, when baby John’s mother wrote to Dr. Money, he urged her to bring the baby to Baltimore. After several consultations and long deliberation, the parents gave the go-ahead. On July 3, 1967, baby John, now 22 months old, underwent surgical castration and reconstructive surgery. He became baby Joan. As the years passed, the child’s parents tried to follow Dr. Money’s instructions scrupulously. Joan wore lacy dresses and bonnets. She received dolls and skipping ropes for presents. She became a Girl Scout. At puberty, she took regular doses of estrogen.

In 1972, Dr. Money made the case of John/Joan public at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, D.C. The experiment, he said, was an unqualified success. Joan was feminine in manner and appearance. According to *Time* magazine, this proved that “conventional patterns of masculine and feminine behavior can be altered.” Furthermore, Money’s work cast “doubt on the theory that major sexual differences, psychological as well as anatomical, are immutably set by the genes at conception” (quoted in Colapinto, 1997: 66). Dr. Money subsequently reported Joan’s good progress in 1978 and 1985.

Then, in March 1997, a bombshell: Dr. Money, it emerged, had thoroughly doctored his reports. A biologist from the University of Hawaii and a psychiatrist from the Canadian Ministry of Health unleashed a big scientific scandal when they published an article in the *Archives of Adolescent and Pediatric Medicine*. It showed that John/Joan had in fact struggled against his/her imposed girlhood from the start. In December, a long and moving exposé of the case in *Rolling Stone* magazine gave further details.

The authors of these articles based their judgments on a review of medical records and extensive interviews with John/Joan’s parents, twin brother, and John/Joan him/herself. They documented that John/Joan tried to tear off her first dress, wanted a toy razor like her brother’s, refused to play with makeup and her toy sewing machine, insisted on playing with her brother’s dump trucks and Tinker Toys, and strongly preferred to urinate standing up, even though it made a mess. John/Joan was a “tomboy.” By the age of 7, she said she wanted to be a boy. She looked, walked, and talked like a boy and had stereotypical boys’ interests. She detested Girl Scouts. At 6 or 7, she decided she wanted to be a garbage man when she grew up. She refused to play with girls in kindergarten and at school. At 12 she began taking estrogen, but only under protest.

Finally, in 1980, unable to suffer her imposed sexual identity any longer, Joan stopped taking estrogen and had her breasts surgically removed. She then had a penis surgically constructed. She was now John again. Subsequent surgeries allowed John to have sex with a woman at the age of 23. He married the woman 2 years later and adopted her three children from a previous marriage. John is now a devoted father. In 2000, he allowed his biography to be published; his real name is David Reimer, and he still lives in Winnipeg. After his long and painful journey, he enjoys a happy family life, although, understandably, he is still deeply troubled by his past.

The story of John/Joan introduces the first big question of this chapter. What makes us male or female? Of course, part of the answer is biological. Your **sex** depends on whether you were born with distinct male or female genitals and a genetic program that released either male or female hormones to stimulate the development of your reproductive system.

However, the case of John/Joan also shows that more is involved in becoming male or female than biological sex differences. Recalling his life as Joan, John said: “[E]veryone is telling you that you’re a girl. But you say to yourself, ‘I don’t *feel* like a girl.’ You think girls are supposed to be delicate and *like* girl things—tea parties, things like that. But I like to *do* guy stuff. It doesn’t match” (quoted in Colapinto, 1997: 66; our emphasis). As this quotation suggests, being male or female involves not just biology but also certain “masculine” and “feminine” feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. Accordingly, sociologists distinguish biological sex from sociological **gender**. Your gender is composed of the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors typically associated with being male or female. **Gender identity** is your identification with, or sense of belonging to, a particular sex—biologically, psychologically, and socially. When you behave according to widely shared expectations about how males or females are supposed to act, you adopt a **gender role**.

Contrary to first impressions, the case of John/Joan suggests that, unlike sex, gender is not determined just by biology. Research shows that babies first develop a vague sense of being a boy or a girl at about the age of 1. They develop a full-blown sense of gender identity between the ages of 2 and 3 (Blum, 1997). We can therefore be confident that baby John already knew he was a boy when he was assigned a female gender identity at the age of 22 months. He had, after all, been raised as a boy by his parents and treated as a boy by his brother for almost 2 years. He had seen boys behaving differently from girls on TV and in storybooks. He had played only with stereotypical boys’ toys. After his gender reassignment, the constant presence of his twin brother reinforced those early lessons on how boys ought to behave. In short, baby John’s *social* learning of his gender identity was already far advanced by the time he had his sex-change operation. Dr. Money’s experiment was thus bound to fail.

If gender reassignment occurs before the age of 18 months, it is usually successful (Green, 1974).<sup>1</sup> However, once the social learning of gender takes hold, as with baby John, it is apparently difficult to undo, even by means of reconstructive surgery, hormones, and parental and professional pressure. The main lesson we draw from this story is not that biology is destiny but that the social learning of gender begins very early in life.

## Chapter Plan

The first half of this chapter helps you better understand what makes us male or female. We first outline two competing theories of gender differences. The first theory argues gender is inherent in our biological makeup and is merely reinforced by society. The second argues gender is constructed mainly by social influences. For reasons outlined below, we side with the second viewpoint.

After establishing our theoretical approach, we examine how people learn gender roles during socialization in the family and at school. Then we show how everyday social interactions and advertising reinforce gender roles.

<sup>1</sup>Still, a movement has emerged among some adults who had their sex assigned when they were infants to allow them to (a) choose their sex when they reach puberty or (b) continue living with ambiguous genitals if they wish to do so.

We next discuss how members of society enforce **heterosexuality**—the preference for members of the opposite sex as sexual partners. For reasons that are still poorly understood, some people resist and even reject the gender roles that are assigned to them because of their biological sex. When this occurs, negative sanctions are often applied to get them to conform or to punish them for their deviance. Members of society are often eager to use emotional and physical violence to enforce conventional gender roles.

The second half of the chapter examines one of the chief consequences of people learning conventional gender roles. Gender, as currently constructed, creates and maintains social inequality. We illustrate this in two ways. We first investigate why gender is associated with an earnings gap between women and men in the paid labor force. We then show how gender inequality encourages sexual harassment and rape. In concluding our discussion of sexuality and gender, we discuss some social policies that sociologists have recommended to decrease gender inequality and improve women's safety.

## THEORIES OF GENDER

### Essentialism<sup>2</sup>

As just noted, most arguments about the origins of gender differences in human behavior adopt one of two perspectives. Some analysts see gender differences as a reflection of naturally evolved dispositions. Sociologists call this perspective **essentialism** (Weeks, 1996: 15). That is because it views gender as part of the nature or “essence” of one's biological makeup. Other analysts see gender differences as a reflection of the different social positions occupied by women and men. Sociologists call this perspective **social constructionism** because it views gender as “constructed” by social structure and culture. We now summarize and criticize essentialism. We then turn to social constructionism.

### Freud

Sigmund Freud (1977 [1905]) offered an early and influential essentialist explanation of male-female differences. He believed that differences in male and female anatomy account for the development of distinct masculine and feminine gender roles.

According to Freud, children around the age of 3 begin to pay attention to their genitals. As a young boy becomes preoccupied with his penis, he unconsciously develops a fantasy of sexually possessing the most conspicuous female in his life: his mother. Soon, he begins to resent his father because only his father is allowed to possess the mother sexually. Because he has seen his mother or another girl naked, the boy also develops anxiety that his father will castrate him for desiring his mother.<sup>3</sup> To resolve this fear, the boy represses his feelings for his mother. That is, he stores them in the unconscious part of his personality. In due course, this repression allows him to begin identifying with his father. This leads to the development of a strong, independent masculine personality.

In contrast, the young girl begins to develop a feminine personality when she realizes she lacks a penis. According to Freud:

[Girls] notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis . . . She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it (quoted in Steinem, 1994: 50).

<sup>2</sup>We are grateful to Rhonda Lenton for her ideas on essentialism and its critique. See Lenton (2001).

<sup>3</sup>Freud called this set of emotions the “Oedipus complex” after the ancient Greek legend of Oedipus. Oedipus was abandoned as a child. When he became an adult he accidentally killed his father and unwittingly married his mother. Discovering his true relationship to his mother, he blinded himself and died in exile.

Due to her “penis envy,” the young girl soon develops a sense of inferiority, according to Freud. She also grows angry with her mother, who, she naively thinks, is responsible for cutting off the penis she must have once had. She rejects her mother and develops an unconscious sexual desire for her father. Eventually, however, realizing she will never have a penis, the girl comes to identify with her mother. This is a way of vicariously acquiring her father’s penis in Freud’s view. In the “normal” development of a mature woman, the girl’s wish to have a penis is transformed into a desire to have children. However, says Freud, since women are never able to resolve their penis envy completely, they are normally immature and dependent on men. This dependence is evident from the “fact” that women can be fully sexually satisfied only by vaginally-induced orgasm.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a host of gender differences in personality and behavior follows from the anatomical sex differences that children observe around the age of 3.

### Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology

For the past 25 years, sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists have offered a second essentialist theory. We introduced this theory in Chapter 3 (“Culture”). According to sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists, all humans instinctively try to ensure their genes get passed on to future generations. However, men and women develop different strategies to achieve this goal. A woman has a bigger investment than a man in ensuring the survival of their offspring. That is because the woman produces only a small number of eggs during her reproductive life and, at most, can give birth to about 20 children. It is therefore in a woman’s best interest to maintain primary responsibility for her genetic children and to look around for the best mate with whom to intermix her genes. He is the man who can best help support the children after birth. In contrast, most men can produce hundreds of millions of sperm every 24–48 hours. Thus, a man increases the chance his and only his genes will get passed on to future generations if he is promiscuous yet jealously possessive of his partners. Moreover, since men compete with other men for sexual access to women, men evolve competitive and aggressive dispositions that include physical violence. Women, says one evolutionary psychologist, are greedy for money, while men want casual sex with women, treat women’s bodies as their property, and react violently to women who incite male sexual jealousy. These are “universal features of our evolved selves” that contribute to the survival of the human species (Buss, 1994: 211; 1998). Thus, from the point of view of sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, gender differences in behavior are based in biological differences between women and men.

### A Critique of Essentialism

Sociologists have lodged four main criticisms against essentialist arguments such as those of Freud and the sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists.

*First, essentialists ignore the historical and cultural variability of gender and sexuality.* There are wide variations from one society to the next in the level of gender inequality, the rate of male violence against women, criteria for mate selection, and all other gender differences that appear universal to the essentialists. This variability deflates the idea that biological constants account for innate behavioral differences between women and men. Three examples help illustrate this point.

1. Women’s tendency to stress the “good provider” role in selecting male partners, and men’s tendency to stress women’s domestic skills, decrease in societies with low levels of gender inequality (Eagley and Wood, 1999). Thus, by changing the level of gender inequality in society you can change male and female criteria for mate selection.

<sup>4</sup>Freud called this set of emotions the “Electra complex” after the ancient Greek legend of Electra. Electra persuaded her brother to kill their mother and their mother’s lover in order to avenge their father’s murder. Incidentally, some sexologists call into question the existence of vaginal orgasm and stress the importance of clitoral stimulation (Masters and Johnson, 1966). This viewpoint emerged around the same time as the modern feminist movement and as more and more people came to view sexuality not just as a means of reproduction but also as a means of enjoyment.



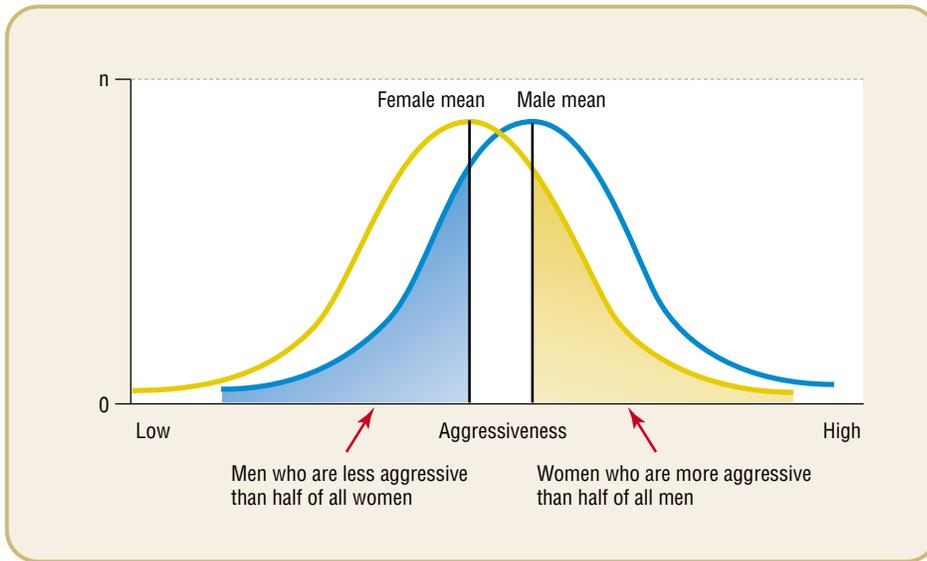
Definitions of “male” and “female” traits vary across societies. For example, the ceremonial dress of male Wodaabe nomads in Niger may appear “feminine” by conventional North American standards.

2. Social situations involving competition and threat stimulate production of the hormone testosterone in women, causing them to act more aggressively. This happens when women become, say, corporate lawyers or police officers (Blum, 1997: 158–88). Thus, by allowing women to take jobs that stress competition and threat, you can change their level of aggressiveness.<sup>5</sup>
3. Gender differences are declining rapidly. Literally hundreds of studies, conducted mainly in the United States, show that women are developing traits that were traditionally considered masculine. Women have become more assertive, competitive, independent, and analytical in the last 3 decades (Twenge, 1997). They play more aggressive sports, choose more math and science courses, do better in standardized tests, take more nontraditional jobs, and earn more money than they used to. One recent study found that, if current trends continue, the difference between male and female math and science scores will disappear in 30–40 years (Nowell and Hedges, 1998: 210; Shea, 1994; see also Duffy, Gunther, and Walters, 1997; Tavis, 1992: 51–2). In what may be a first, standardized math tests administered in Ontario, Canada, in 1998 and 1999 to all Grade 3 and Grade 6 students found that girls outscored boys by 3% in Grade 3 and 2% in Grade 6 (Galt, 1999). It seems that by making school curricula and teaching methods less sexist, opening opportunities for women to study in college and get a wider variety of jobs, and so forth, a whole range of gender differences starts to disappear. As these examples show, then, gender differences are not inherent in men and women. They vary with social conditions.

*The second problem with essentialism is that it tends to generalize from the average, ignoring variations within gender groups.* On average, women and men do differ in some respects. For example, one of the best-documented gender differences is that men are on average more verbally and physically aggressive than women. However, when sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists say men are *inherently* more aggressive than women, they make it seem as if this is true of all men and all women. As Figure 9.1 shows, however, it is not. When trained researchers measure verbal or physical aggressiveness, scores vary widely within gender groups. Aggressiveness is distributed so that there is considerable overlap between women and men. Thus, many women are more aggressive than the average man and many men are less aggressive than the average woman.

*Third, no evidence directly supports the essentialists’ major claims.* Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists have not identified any of the genes that, they claim, cause male jealousy, female nurturance, the unequal division of labor between men and women,

<sup>5</sup>Women born with higher testosterone levels may gravitate to more stereotypically male jobs in the first place. But given what we know about how high-stress jobs increase testosterone levels, it also seems likely that biological tendencies are accentuated or dampened by occupational demands. This argument is reinforced by research on girls born with unusually high testosterone levels. They prefer rough, aggressive play, but that preference is almost always ratcheted down when they start playing with other girls, who direct them toward standard girls’ games. Nature provides; society helps to decide (Blum, 1997: 158–88).



◆ **FIGURE 9.1** ◆  
The Distribution of Aggressiveness Among Men and Women

and so forth. Freudians have not collected any experimental or survey data that show boys are more independent than girls because of their emotional reactions to the discovery of their sex organs.

Finally, essentialists' explanations for gender differences ignore the role of power. Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists assume that existing behavior patterns help ensure the survival of the species. However, their assumption overlooks the fact that men are usually in a position of greater power and authority than women. Behavioral differences between women and men may therefore result not from any biological imperative but from men being in a position to establish their preferences over the interests of women. Indeed, from this point of view, sociobiology and evolutionary psychology may be seen as examples of the exercise of male power, that is, as a rationalization for male domination and sexual aggression. Much the same may be said of Freud's interpretation. *Must* young girls define themselves in relation to young boys by focusing on their lack of a penis? There is no reason young girls' sexual self-definitions cannot focus positively on their own reproductive organs, including their unique ability to bear children. Freud simply assumes men are superior to women and then invents a speculative theory that justifies gender differences.

## Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is the main alternative to essentialism. We illustrate social constructionism by first considering how boys and girls learn masculine and feminine roles in the family and at school (see Box 9.1). We then show how gender roles are maintained in the course of everyday social interaction and through advertising in the mass media. We begin our discussion of social constructionism by examining the effect of an American icon—the Barbie doll—on girls' gender roles.

## Gender Socialization

Barbie dolls have been around since 1959. Based on the creation of a German cartoonist, Barbie is the first modern doll modeled after an adult. (Lili, the German original, became a pornographic doll for men.) Some industry experts predicted mothers would never buy dolls with breasts for their little girls. Were *they* wrong! Mattel now sells about 10 million Barbies and 20 million accompanying outfits annually. The Barbie trademark is worth a billion dollars.

What do American girls learn when they play with Barbie? The author of a Web site devoted to Barbie undoubtedly speaks for millions when she writes: "Barbie was more





### BOX 9.1 SOCIOLOGY AT THE MOVIES

#### AMERICAN PIE (1999)

What could be more embarrassing than your father catching you masturbating? Perhaps your father bringing you pornography and condoms, and trying to give you a mini-course in sex education? *American Pie*, a popular movie released in the summer of 1999, portrayed these incidents while trying to make sense of sexual coming of age in the United States today.

*American Pie* focuses on the lives of four high school seniors in a middle-class Michigan suburb. They vow to lose their virginity by the time they graduate. The movie traces the sexual misadventures of the foursome. The jock with a golden heart first tries to seduce a college woman. His macho tactics fail miserably. He then joins a choir and begins to date a conservative young woman. Another one of the foursome studies a book of sexual “secrets” hoping to convince his girlfriend to have intercourse. The third character—the “nerd”—has no prospects. The central character—the boy with the pie—falters miserably with a willing foreign exchange student.



*American Pie* (1999).

Besides providing an amusing view of four recognizable types of boys in an urban American high school, the movie probes the place of sex in American life. It portrays the attempt to lose one’s virginity as an important rite of passage full of missteps, embarrassment, humor, and hypocrisy. Losing one’s virginity signifies coming of age—becoming an adult—for these four high school seniors.

We also learn through the longings and antics of these boys that sexual maturation means becoming “gendered.” That is, as

they develop their sexuality they learn what it means to be masculine in this time and place. Sexuality, we come to understand, helps us define ourselves.

Regardless of whether you’ve seen the movie, you undoubtedly remember all the talk about sex in high school. What exactly did you talk about when you talked about sex? Was it *just* sex? Or was it gender too? How did talk about sex help you define your masculinity or femininity? How do you think this process differs for girls and boys?



than a doll to me. She was a way of living: the Ideal Woman. When I played with her, I could make her do and be ANYTHING I wanted. Never before or since have I found such an ideal method of living vicariously through anyone or anything. And I don’t believe I am alone. I am certain that most people have, in fact, lived their dreams with Barbie as the role player” (Elliott, 1995).

One dream that Barbie stimulates among many girls concerns body image. After all, Barbie is a scale model of a woman with a 40-18-32 figure. The scales that come with Workout Barbie always register a sprightly 110 lb. She can choose from many hundreds of outfits. And, judging from the Barbie sets available, she divides her days mainly between personal hygiene and physical fitness.<sup>6</sup> All this attention to appearance and physical perfection seems to be largely for the benefit of Ken. So when American girls play with Barbie, they learn to want to be slim, blond, and shapely and to exist mainly to please a pleasant man. The Scandinavian rock group Aqua put it well in their 1997 top-10 hit, “Barbie Girl”: “Make me walk / Make me talk / I can act like a star / I can beg on my knees . . . You can touch / You can play / If you say / ‘I’m always yours.’” Mattel tried to

<sup>6</sup>We say “mainly” because in recent years Mattel has released a few Barbie sets that portray Barbie as a professional.



A movement to market more gender-neutral toys emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it has now been overtaken by the resumption of a strong tendency to market toys based on gender.

sue Aqua for its social commentary. A Los Angeles judge tossed the case out of court in May 1998.<sup>7</sup>

A comparable story, with competition and aggression its theme, could be told about how boys' toys, such as GI Joe, teach stereotypical male roles. True, a movement to market more gender-neutral toys arose in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it has now been overtaken by the resumption of a strong tendency to market toys based on gender. As *The Wall Street Journal* recently pointed out, "gender-neutral is out, as more kids' marketers push single-sex products" (Bannon, 2000: B1). For example, in 2000, Toys 'R' Us took the wraps off a new store design that included a store directory featuring "Boy's World" and "Girl's World." The Boy's World section listed action figures, sports collectibles, radio remote-controlled cars, Tonka trucks, boys' role-playing games, and walkie-talkies. The Girl's World section listed Barbie dolls, baby dolls, collectible horses, play kitchens, housekeeping toys, girls' dress-up, jewelry, cosmetics, and bath and body products.

Yet toys are only part of the story of gender socialization, and hardly its first or final chapter. Research shows that, from birth, infant boys and girls who are matched in length, weight, and general health are treated differently by parents, and fathers in particular. Girls tend to be identified as delicate, weak, beautiful, and cute, boys as strong, alert, and well coordinated (Rubin, Provenzano, and Lurra, 1974). When viewing videotape of a 9-month-old infant, experimental subjects tend to label its startled reaction to a stimulus as "anger" if the child has earlier been identified by the experimenters as a boy, and as "fear" if it has earlier been identified as a girl, *whatever the infant's actual sex* (Condry and Condry, 1976). Parents, and especially fathers, are more likely to encourage their sons to engage in boisterous and competitive play and discourage their daughters from doing likewise. Parents tend to encourage girls to engage in cooperative, role-playing games (MacDonald and Parke, 1986). These different play patterns lead to the heightened development of verbal and emotional skills among girls. They lead to more concern with winning and the establishment of hierarchy among boys (Tannen, 1990). Boys are more likely than girls to be praised for assertiveness, and girls are more likely than boys to be rewarded for compliance (Kerig, Cowan, and Cowan, 1993). Given this early socialization, it seems perfectly "natural" that boys' toys stress aggression, competition, spatial manipulation, and outdoor activities, while girls' toys stress nurturing, physical attractiveness, and indoor activities (Hughes, 1995 [1991]). Still, what seems natural must be continuously socially reinforced. Presented with a choice between playing with a tool set and a dish set, preschool boys are about as likely to choose one as the other—unless the dish set is presented as a girl's toy and they think their fathers would view playing with it as "bad." Then, they tend to pick the tool set (Raag and Rackliff, 1998).

It would take someone who has spent very little time in the company of children to think they are passive objects of socialization. They are not. Parents, teachers, and other authority figures typically try to impose their ideas of appropriate gender behavior on

<sup>7</sup>Ironically, Lene Nystrom, the Norwegian lead singer of *Aqua*, had breast implants in 2000. She upset many women when she told Norway's leading daily newspaper, "I just want to be more feminine" (quoted in "Aqua Singer. . ." 2000).

children. But children creatively interpret, negotiate, resist, and self-impose these ideas all the time. Gender, we might say, is something that is done, not just given (West and Zimmerman, 1987). This is nowhere more evident than in the way children play.

Consider the fourth- and fifth-grade American classroom that sociologist Barrie Thorne (1993) observed. The teacher periodically asked the children to choose their own desks. With the exception of one girl, they always segregated *themselves* by gender. The teacher then drew upon this self-segregation in pitting the boys against the girls in spelling and math contests. These contests were marked by cross-gender antagonism and expression of within-gender solidarity. Similarly, when children played chasing games in the schoolyard, groups often *spontaneously* crystallized along gender lines. These games had special names, some of which, like “chase and kiss,” had clear sexual meanings. Provocation, physical contact, and avoidance were all sexually charged parts of the game.

Although Thorne found that contests, chasing games, and other activities often involved self-segregation of boys and girls, she saw many cases of boys and girls playing together. She also noticed quite a lot of “boundary crossing.” Boundary crossing involves boys playing stereotypically “girls” games and girls playing stereotypically “boys” games. The most common form of boundary crossing involved girls who were skilled at specific sports that were central to the boys’ world—sports like soccer, baseball, and basketball. If girls demonstrated skill at these activities, boys often accepted them as participants. Finally, Thorne noticed occasions where boys and girls interacted without strain and without strong gender identities coming to the fore. For instance, activities requiring cooperation, such as a group radio show or art project, lessened attention to gender. Another situation that lessened strain between boys and girls, causing gender to recede in importance, was when adults organized mixed-gender encounters in the classroom and in physical education periods. On such occasions, adults legitimized cross-gender contact. Mixed-gender interaction was also more common in less public and crowded settings. Thus, boys and girls were more likely to play together and in a relaxed way in the relative privacy of their neighborhoods. By contrast, in the schoolyard, where they were under the close scrutiny of their peers, gender segregation and antagonism were more evident.

In sum, Thorne’s research makes two important contributions to our understanding of gender socialization. First, children are actively engaged in the process of constructing gender roles. They are not merely passive recipients of adult demands. Second, while school children tend to segregate themselves by gender, boundaries between boys and girls are sometimes fluid and sometimes rigid, depending on social circumstances. In other words, the content of children’s gendered activities is by no means fixed.

In her research on schoolchildren, sociologist Barrie Thorne noticed quite a lot of “boundary crossing” between boys and girls. Most commonly, boys accepted girls as participants in soccer, baseball, and basketball games if girls demonstrated skill at these sports.



This is not to suggest that adults have no gender demands and expectations. They do, and their demands and expectations contribute importantly to gender socialization. For instance, in most schools, teachers and guidance counselors still expect boys to do better in the sciences and math. They expect girls to achieve higher marks in English. Parents, for their part, tend to reinforce these stereotypes in their evaluation of different activities (Eccles, Jacobs, and Harold, 1990). Significantly, research comparing mixed- and single-sex schools shows that girls do much better in the latter. Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Gregg Lee Carter (2000: 99–100) summarize this research and are worth quoting at length:

[In girls-only schools], female cognitive development is greater; female occupational aspirations and their ultimate attainment are increased; female self-confidence and self-esteem are magnified. Moreover, . . . females receive better treatment in the classroom; they are more likely to be encouraged to explore—and to have access to—wider curriculum opportunities; and teachers have greater respect for their work. Finally, females attending single-sex schools have . . . more egalitarian attitudes towards the role of women in society than do their counterparts in mixed-sex schools. . . . Single-sex schools accrue these benefits for girls for a variety of reasons . . . : (1) a diminished emphasis on “youth culture,” which centers on athletics, social life, physical attractiveness, heterosexual popularity, and negative attitudes toward academics; (2) the provision of more successful same-sex role models (the top students in all subjects and all extracurricular activities [are] girls); (3) a reduction in sex bias in teacher-student interaction (there are [no] boys around [who] can be “favoured”); and (4) elimination of sex stereotypes in peer interaction (generally, cross-sex peer interaction in school involves male dominance, male leadership, and, often, sexual harassment).

Adolescents must usually start choosing courses in school by the age of 14 or 15. By then, their **gender ideologies** are well formed. Gender ideologies are sets of interrelated ideas about what constitutes appropriate masculine and feminine roles and behavior. One aspect of gender ideology becomes especially important around grades 9 and 10: adolescents’ ideas about whether, as adults, they will focus mainly on the home, paid work, or a combination of the two. Adolescents usually make course choices with gender ideologies in mind. Boys are strongly inclined to consider only their careers in making course choices. Most girls are inclined to consider both home responsibilities and careers, although a minority considers only home responsibilities and another minority considers only careers. As a result, boys tend to choose career-oriented courses, particularly in math and science, more often than girls. In college, the pattern is accentuated. Young women tend to choose easier courses that lead to lower paying jobs because they expect to devote a large part of their lives to child rearing and housework (Hochschild with Machung, 1989: 15–18; Machung, 1989). The effect of these choices is to sharply restrict women’s career opportunities and earnings in science and business (see Table 9.1). We examine this problem in depth in the second half this chapter.

### The Mass Media and Body Image

The social construction of gender does not stop at the school steps. Outside school, children, adolescents, and adults continue to negotiate gender roles as they interact with the mass media. If you systematically observe the roles played by women and men in TV

Academic Major	Starting Salary	Percent Women in Occupation
1. Chemical Engineering	\$42,758	18.8
2. Mechanical Engineering	39,852	6.2
3. Electrical Engineering	39,811	9.0
4. Industrial Engineering	37,732	15.7
5. Computer Science	36,964	29.2

◆ **TABLE 9.1** ◆  
Academic Majors With the  
Highest Starting Salaries,  
United States, 1996–97

SOURCES: Calculated from (“Estimated Starting Salaries . . .” 1997; United States Department of Labor, 1998a).

programs and ads one evening, you will probably discover a pattern noted by sociologists since the 1970s. Women will more frequently be seen cleaning house, taking care of children, modeling clothes, and acting as objects of male desire. Men will more frequently be seen in aggressive, action-oriented, and authoritative roles. The effect of these messages on viewers is much the same as that of the Disney movies and Harlequin romances we discussed in Chapter 4 (“Socialization”). They reinforce the normality of traditional gender roles. As we will now see, many people even try to shape their bodies after the body images portrayed in the mass media.

The human body has always served as a sort of personal billboard that advertises gender. However, historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg (1997) makes a good case for the view that the importance of body image to our self-definition has grown over the past century. Just listen to the difference in emphasis on the body in the diary resolutions of two typical, white, middle-class American girls, separated by a mere 90 years. From 1892: “Resolved, not to talk about myself or feelings. To think before speaking. To work seriously. To be self-restrained in conversation and actions. Not to let my thoughts wander. To be dignified. Interest myself more in others.” From 1982: “I will try to make myself better in any way I possibly can with the help of my budget and baby-sitting money. I will lose weight, get new lenses, already got new haircut, good makeup, new clothes and accessories” (quoted in Brumberg, 1997: xxi).

As body image became more important for one’s self-definition in the course of the 20th century, the ideal body image became thinner, especially for women. Thus, the first American “glamour girl” was Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson, who was famous in advertising and society cartoons in the 1890s and 1900s as the “Gibson Girl.” According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute, “[e]very man in America wanted to win her” and “every woman in America wanted to be her. Women stood straight as poplars and tightened their corset strings to show off tiny waists” (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000). As featured in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1905, the Gibson Girl measured 38-27-45—certainly not slim by today’s standards. During the 20th century, however, the ideal female body type thinned out. The “White Rock Girl,” featured on the logo of the White Rock beverage company, was 5’4” and weighed 140 lb. in 1894. In 1947, she had slimmed down to 125 lb. By 1970, she was 5’8” and 118 lb. (Peacock, 2000).

Why did body image become more important to people’s self-definition during the 20th century? Why was slimness stressed? Part of the answer to both questions is that more Americans grew overweight as their lifestyles became more sedentary. As they became

The “White Rock Girl,” featured on the logo of the White Rock beverage company, dropped 15 pounds between 1894 (left) and 1947 (right).





The low-cal and diet food industry promotes an ideal of slimness that is often impossible to attain and that generates widespread body dissatisfaction.

better educated, they also grew increasingly aware of the health problems associated with being overweight. The desire to slim down was, then, partly a reaction to bulking up. But that is not the whole story. The rake-thin models who populate modern ads are not promoting good health. They are promoting an extreme body shape that is virtually unattainable for most people. They do so because it is good business. In 1990, the United States diet and lo-cal frozen entrée industry alone enjoyed revenues of nearly \$700 million. Some 65 million Americans spent upwards of \$30 billion in the diet and self-help industry in the pursuit of losing weight. The fitness industry generated \$43 billion in revenue and the cosmetic surgery industry another \$5 billion (Hesse-Biber, 1996: 35, 39, 51, 53). Bankrolled by these industries, advertising in the mass media blankets us with images of slim bodies and makes these body types appealing. Once people become convinced that they need to develop bodies like the ones they see in ads, many of them are really in trouble because these body images are very difficult for most people to attain.

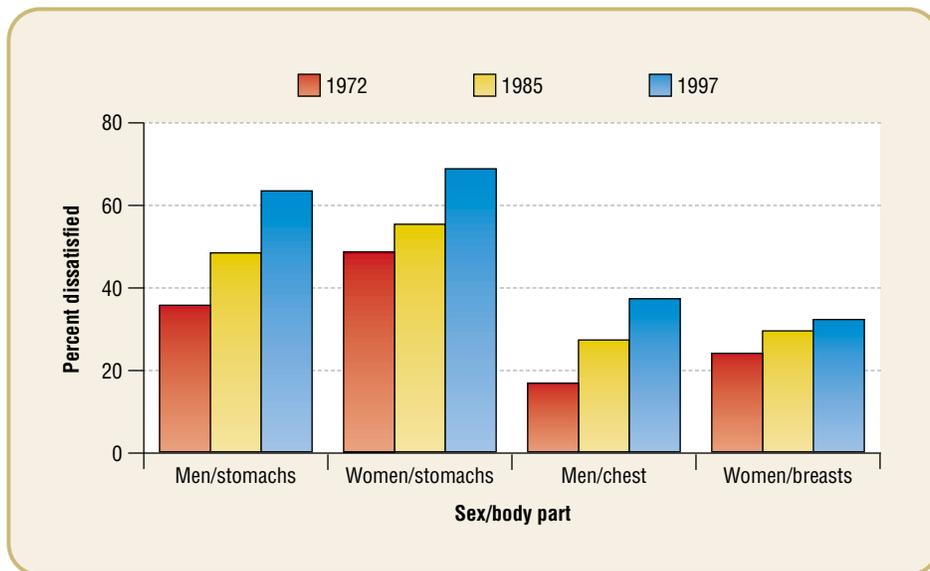
Survey data show just how widespread dissatisfaction with our bodies is and how important a role the mass media play in generating our discomfort. For example, a 1997 survey of North American college graduates showed that 56% of women and 43% of men were dissatisfied with their overall appearance (Garner, 1997). Only 3% of the dissatisfied women, but 22% of the dissatisfied men, wanted to gain weight. This reflects the greater desire of men for muscular, stereotypically male physiques. Most of the dissatisfied men, and even more of the dissatisfied women (89%), wanted to lose weight. This reflects the general societal push toward slimness and its greater effect on women.

Figure 9.2 reveals gender differences in body ideals in a different way. It compares women's and men's attitudes towards their stomachs. It also compares women's attitudes toward their breasts with men's attitudes toward their chests. It shows, first, that women are more concerned about their stomachs than men are. Second, it shows that by 1997 men were more concerned about their chests than women were about their breasts. Clearly, then, people's body ideals are influenced by their gender. Note also that Figure 9.2 shows

◆ **FIGURE 9.2** ◆  
**Body Dissatisfaction,**  
**United States, 1972–1997**  
**(in percent, n = 4,000)**

Note: The n of 4,000 refers to the 1997 survey only. The number of respondents in the earlier surveys was not given.

SOURCE: Garner (1997).



◆ **TABLE 9.2** ◆  
**The Influence of Fashion**  
**Models on Feelings About**  
**Appearance, North America,**  
**1997 (in percent; n = 4,000)**

SOURCE: Adapted from Garner (1997).

	Men	Women	Extremely Dissatisfied Women
<i>I always or often:</i>			
Compare myself to models in magazines	12	27	43
Carefully study the shape of models	19	28	47
<i>Very thin or muscular models make me:</i>			
Feel insecure about my weight	15	29	67
Want to lose weight	18	30	67

trends over time. North Americans’ anxiety about their bodies increased substantially between 1972 and 1997.<sup>8</sup>

Table 9.2 suggests that advertising is highly influential in creating anxiety and insecurity about appearance, and particularly about body weight. Here we see that in 1997 nearly 30% of North American women compared themselves with the fashion models they saw in advertisements, felt insecure about their own appearance, and wanted to lose weight as a result. Among women who were dissatisfied with their appearance, the percentages were much larger, with about 45% making comparisons with fashion models and two thirds feeling insecure and wanting to lose weight. It seems safe to conclude that fashion models stimulate body dissatisfaction among many North American women.

Body dissatisfaction, in turn, motivates many women to diet. Because of anxiety about their weight, 84% of North American women said they had dieted in the 1997 survey. The comparable figure for men was 54%. Just how important is it for people to achieve their weight goals? According to the survey, it’s a life or weight issue: 24% of women and 17% of men said they would trade more than 3 years of their lives to achieve their weight goals.

Body dissatisfaction prompts some people to take dangerous and even life-threatening measures to reduce. In the 1997 survey, 50% of female smokers and 30% of male smokers said they smoke to control their weight. Other surveys suggest that between 1% and 5% of American women suffer from anorexia, or refusal to eat enough to remain healthy.

<sup>8</sup>Slimness is somewhat less important for African-American women, who in general have healthier attitudes towards their bodies than white women (Molloy and Herzberger, 1998.)

About the same percentage of American female college students suffer from bulimia, or regular self-induced vomiting. For college men, the prevalence of bulimia is between 0.2% and 1.5% (Averett and Korenman, 1996: 305–6). In the United Kingdom, eating disorders are just as common, and the British Medical Association has warned that celebrities such as *Ally McBeal* star Calista Flockhart are contributing to a rise in anorexia and bulimia. However, British magazine editors are taking some responsibility for the problem. They recognize that waif-thin models are likely influencing young women to feel anxious about their weight and shape. As a result, the editors recently drew up a voluntary code of conduct that urges them to monitor the body images they portray, impose a minimum size for models, and use models of varying shapes and sizes (“British Magazines . . .,” 2000). Whether similar measures are adopted in the United States remains to be seen.

### Male-Female Interaction

The gender roles children learn in their families, at school, and through the mass media form the basis for their social interaction as adults. For instance, by playing team sports, boys tend to learn that social interaction is most often about competition, conflict, self-sufficiency, and hierarchical relationships (leaders vs. led). They understand the importance of taking center stage and boasting about their talents (Messner, 1995 [1989]). Since many of the most popular video games for boys exclude female characters, use women as sex objects, or involve violence against women, they reinforce some of the most unsavory lessons of traditional gender socialization (Dietz, 1998). On the other hand, by playing with dolls and baking sets, girls tend to learn that social interaction is most often about maintaining cordial relationships, avoiding conflict, and resolving differences of opinion through negotiation. They understand the importance of giving advice and not promoting themselves or being bossy.

Because of these early socialization patterns, misunderstandings between men and women are common. A stereotypical example: Harold is driving around lost. However, he refuses to ask for directions because doing so would amount to an admission of inadequacy and therefore a loss of status. Meanwhile, it seems perfectly “natural” to Sybil to want to share information, so she urges Harold to ask for directions. The result: conflict between Harold and Sybil (Tannen, 1990: 62).

Gender-specific interaction styles also have serious implications for who gets heard and who gets credit at work. Here are some examples uncovered by Deborah Tannen’s research (1994a: 132–59):

- ◆ A female office manager doesn’t want to seem bossy or arrogant. She is eager to preserve consensus among her coworkers. So she spends a good deal of time soliciting their opinions before making an important decision. She asks questions, listens attentively, and offers suggestions. She then decides. But her boss perceives her approach as indecisive and incompetent. He wants to recruit leaders for upper-management positions, so he overlooks the woman and selects an assertive man for a senior job that just opened up.
- ◆ A female technical director at a radio station wants to help a nervous new male soundboard operator do a good job. However, she is sensitive to the possibility that giving him direct orders may make him feel incompetent and cause him to do worse. So instead of instructing him, she starts a conversation about Macintosh computers, something he knows a lot about. This makes him feel capable and relaxed, and he sits back and puts his feet up. She then talks about some technical issues. She is careful to put everything in the context of an upcoming show (something the new soundboard operator couldn’t possibly know about) rather than general technical knowledge (something he should have). Because of her sensitive management style, the show goes off without a hitch. Thankfully, the technical director’s male supervisor did not come into the studio when she was making queries and the soundboard operator had his feet up. If the supervisor had arrived then, he could easily have concluded the technical director was so incompetent she had to get information from a subordinate who had just been hired.

- ♦ Male managers are inclined to say “I” in many situations where female managers are inclined to say “we”—as in “I’m hiring a new manager and I’m going to put him in charge of my marketing division” or “This is what I’ve come up with on the Lakehill deal.” This sort of phrasing draws attention to one’s personal accomplishments. In contrast, Tannen heard a female manager talking about what “we” had done when in fact she had done all the work alone. This sort of phrasing camouflages women’s accomplishments.

The contrasting interaction styles illustrated above often result in female managers not getting credit for competent performance. That is why they sometimes complain about a **glass ceiling**, a social barrier that makes it difficult for them to rise to the top level of management. As we will soon see, factors other than interaction styles, such as outright discrimination and women’s generally greater commitment to family responsibilities, also support the glass ceiling. Yet gender differences in interaction styles play an independent role in constraining women’s career progress.

## Homosexuality

The preceding discussion outlines some powerful social forces pushing us to define ourselves as conventionally masculine or feminine in behavior and appearance. For most people, gender socialization by the family, the school, and the mass media is compelling and it is sustained by daily interactions. A minority of people, however, resists conventional gender roles. For example, **transgendered** people are individuals who want to alter their gender by changing their appearance or resorting to medical intervention. About 1 in every 5,000 to 10,000 people in North America is transgendered. Some transgendered people are **transsexuals**. Transsexuals believe they were born with the “wrong” body. They identify with, and want to live fully as, members of the “opposite” sex. They often take the lengthy and painful path to a sex change operation. About 1 in every 30,000 people in North America is a transsexual (Nolen, 1999). **Homosexuals** are people who prefer sexual partners of the same sex, and **bisexuals** are people who prefer sexual partners of both sexes. People usually call homosexual men gay and homosexual women lesbians. The most comprehensive survey of sexuality in the United States shows that 2.8% of American men and 1.4% of American women think of themselves as homosexual or bisexual. However, 10.1% of men and 8.6% of women (a) think of themselves as homosexual or bisexual, (b) have had some same-sex experience, or (c) have had some same-sex desire (see Table 9.3) (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels, 1994: 299).

Homosexuality has existed in every society. Some societies, such as ancient Greece, have encouraged it. More frequently, however, homosexual acts have been forbidden. Until the late 18th and early 19th centuries in Western Europe and the United States, “unnatural acts” such as sodomy were punishable by death. However, homosexuals were not identified as a distinct category of people until the 1860s. That is when the term “homosexuality” was coined. The term “lesbian” is of even more recent vintage.

We do not yet understand well why some individuals develop homosexual orientations. Some scientists think the reasons are mainly genetic, others think they are chiefly hormonal, while still others point to life experiences during early childhood as the most

♦ **TABLE 9.3** ♦  
**Homosexuality in the United States, 1992 (in percent; n = 3,432)**

SOURCE: Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata (1994: 40).

	Men	Women
Identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual	2.8	1.4
Had sex with person of same sex in past 12 months	3.4	0.6
Had sex with person of same sex at least once since puberty	5.3	3.5
Felt desire for sex with person of same sex	7.7	7.5
Had some same-sex desire or experience or identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual	10.1	8.6



On April 1, 2001, the Netherlands recognized full and equal marriage rights for homosexual couples. Within hours, Dutch citizens were taking advantage of the new law. The Dutch law is part of a worldwide trend to legally recognize long-term same-sex unions.

important factor. We do know that sexual orientation does not appear to be a choice. According to the American Psychological Association, it “emerges for most people in early adolescence without any prior sexual experience . . . [it] is not changeable” (“American Psychological Association,” 1998).

In any case, sociologists are less interested in the origins of homosexuality than in the way it is socially constructed, that is, in the wide variety of ways it is expressed and repressed (Foucault, 1990 [1978]; Weeks, 1986). It is important to note in this connection that homosexuality has become less of a stigma over the past century. Two factors are chiefly responsible for this, one scientific, the other political. In the 20th century, sexologists—psychologists and physicians who study sexual practices scientifically—first recognized and stressed the wide diversity of existing sexual practices. The American sexologist Alfred Kinsey was among the pioneers in this field. He and his colleagues interviewed thousands of men and women. In the 1940s, they concluded that homosexual practices were so widespread that homosexuality could hardly be considered an illness affecting a tiny minority (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, 1948).

Sexologists, then, provided a scientific rationale for belief in the normality of sexual diversity. However, it was sexual minorities themselves who provided the social and political energy needed to legitimize sexual diversity among an increasingly large section of the public. Especially since the middle of the 20th century, gays and lesbians have built large communities and subcultures, especially in major urban areas like New York and San Francisco. They have gone public with their lifestyles. They have organized demonstrations, parades, and political pressure groups to express their self-confidence and demand equal rights with the heterosexual majority. This has done much to legitimize homosexuality and sexual diversity in general.

Yet opposition to people who don’t conform to conventional gender roles remains strong at all stages of the life cycle. When you were a child, did you ever laugh at a girl who, say, liked to climb trees and play with toy trucks? Did you ever call such a girl a “tomboy?” When you were a child, did you ever tease a boy who, say, liked to bake muffins while listening to Mozart? Did you ever call such a boy a “sissy?” If so, your behavior was not unusual. Children are typically strict about enforcing conventional gender roles. They often apply sanctions against playmates who deviate from convention.

Among adults, such opposition is just as strong. What is your attitude today toward transgendered people, transsexuals, and homosexuals? Do you, for example, think that sexual relations between adults of the same sex are always, or almost always, wrong? If



so, you are again not unusual. According to the 1998 General Social Survey, fully 64% of Americans believe that sexual relations between adults of the same sex are always, or almost always, wrong (National Opinion Research Center, 1999).

Antipathy to homosexuals is so strong among some people that they are prepared to back up their beliefs with force. A 1998 study of about 500 young adults in the San Francisco Bay area (probably the most sexually tolerant area in the United States) found that 1 in 10 admitted physically attacking or threatening people they believed were homosexuals. Twenty-four percent reported engaging in antigay name-calling. Among male respondents, 18% reported acting in a violent or threatening way and 32% reported name-calling. In addition, a third of those who had *not* engaged in antigay aggression said they would do so if a homosexual flirted with, or propositioned, them (Franklin, 1998).

Due to widespread animosity toward homosexuals, many people who have wanted sex with members of the same sex, or who have had sex with someone of the same sex, do not identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The operation of norms against homosexuality is evident in figures on the geographical distribution of people who identify themselves as homosexuals or bisexuals. More than 9% of the residents of America's 12 largest cities (excluding suburbs) identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual. That figure falls to just over 4% in the cities ranked 13–100 by size (again excluding suburbs), and it drops to a little over 1% in rural areas. Why? Because small population centers tend to be less tolerant of homosexuality and bisexuality. People with same-sex desires are therefore less likely to express and develop homosexual and bisexual identities in smaller communities. They are inclined to migrate to larger and more liberal cities where supportive, established gay communities exist (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, and Kolata, 1994: 178, 182).

Recent research suggests some antigay crimes may result from repressed homosexual urges on the part of the aggressor (Adams, Wright, and Lohr, 1998). From this point of view, aggressors are “homophobic” or afraid of homosexuals because they cannot cope with their own, possibly subconscious, homosexual impulses. Their aggression is a way of acting out a denial of these impulses. However, while this psychological explanation may account for some antigay violence, it seems inadequate when set alongside the finding that fully half of all young male adults admitted to some form of antigay aggression in the San Francisco Bay area study cited above. An analysis of the motivations of these San Franciscans showed that some of them did commit assaults to prove their toughness and heterosexuality. Others committed assaults just to alleviate boredom and have fun. Still others believed they were defending themselves from aggressive sexual propositions. A fourth group acted violently because they wanted to punish homosexuals for what they perceived as moral transgressions (Franklin, 1998). It seems clear, then, that antigay violence is not just a question of abnormal psychology but a broad, cultural problem with several sources.

On the other hand, anecdotal evidence suggests that opposition to antigay violence is also growing in America. The 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming led to a public outcry. In the wake of his murder, some people called for a broadening of the definition of hate crime to include antigay violence (see Box 9.2). The 1999 movie *Boys Don't Cry* also raised awareness of the problem of antigay violence. The movie, for which Hilary Swank won the Best Actress Oscar, tells the true story of Teena Brandon, a young woman in Nebraska with a sexual identity crisis. She wants a sex-change operation but can't afford one. So she decides to change her name to Brandon Teena and “pass” as a man. She soon develops an intimate relationship with a woman by the name of Lana Tisdel. Tisdel knows Teena is anatomically a female. However, when two male members of Tisdel's family discover the truth about Teena, they beat, rape, and murder her. Teena's only transgression was that she wanted to be a man.

In sum, strong social and cultural forces lead us to distinguish men from women and heterosexuals from homosexuals. We learn these distinctions throughout the socialization process, and we continuously construct them anew in our daily interactions. Most people use positive and negative sanctions to ensure that others conform to conventional heterosexual gender roles. Some people resort to violence to enforce conformity and punish deviance.



Especially since the middle of the 20th century, gays and lesbians have built large communities and subcultures, especially in major urban areas such as New York and San Francisco. They have gone public with their lifestyles. They have organized demonstrations, parades, and political pressure groups to express their self-confidence and demand equal rights with the heterosexual majority. This has done much to legitimize homosexuality and sexual diversity in general.



### BOX 9.2 IT'S YOUR CHOICE

#### HATE CRIME LAW AND HOMOPHOBIA

On October 7, 1998, Matthew Shepard, an undergraduate at the University of Wyoming, went to a campus bar in Laramie. From there, he was lured by Aaron James McKinney and Russell Henderson, both 21, to an area just outside town. McKinney and Henderson apparently wanted to rob Shepard. They wound up murdering him. They used the butt of a gun to beat Shepard's head repeatedly. According to the prosecutor at the trial of the two men, “[a]s

[Shepard] lay there bleeding and begging for his life, he was then bound to the buck fence” (quoted in CNN, 1998). The murderers left Shepard there in near-freezing temperatures. When a passerby saw Shepard several hours later, he thought the nearly dead man was a “scarecrow or a dummy set there for Halloween jokes” (quoted in CNN, 1998). Shepard died 5 days later.

One issue raised by Shepard's death concerns the definition of hate crime. Hate crimes are criminal acts motivated by a person's race, religion, or ethnicity. If hate motivates a crime, the law requires that the perpetrator be punished more severely than otherwise. For example, assaulting a person during an argument generally carries a lighter punishment than assaulting a person because he is an African American. Furthermore, the law (18 United States C. 245) permits federal prosecution of a hate crime only “if the crime was motivated by bias based on race, religion, national origin, or

color, and the assailant intended to prevent the victim from exercising a ‘federally protected right’ (e.g., voting, attending school, etc.)” (Human Rights Campaign, 1999). This definition excludes crimes motivated by the sexual orientation of the victim. According to the FBI, if crimes against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were defined as hate crimes, they would have composed 14% of the total in 1998 (Human Rights Campaign, 1999). Matthew Shepard was 1 of 33 anti-gay murders in the United States in 1998, up from 14 the year before (Human Rights Campaign, 1999).

Do you think crimes motivated by the victim's sexual orientation are the same as crimes motivated by the victim's race, religion, or ethnicity? If so, why? If not, why not? Do you think crimes motivated by the sexual orientation of the victim should be included in the legal definition of hate crime? If so, why? If not, why not?

Our presentation also suggests the social construction of conventional gender roles helps to create and maintain social inequality between women and men. In the remainder of this chapter, we examine the historical origins and some of the present-day consequences of gender inequality.

## GENDER INEQUALITY

### The Origins of Gender Inequality

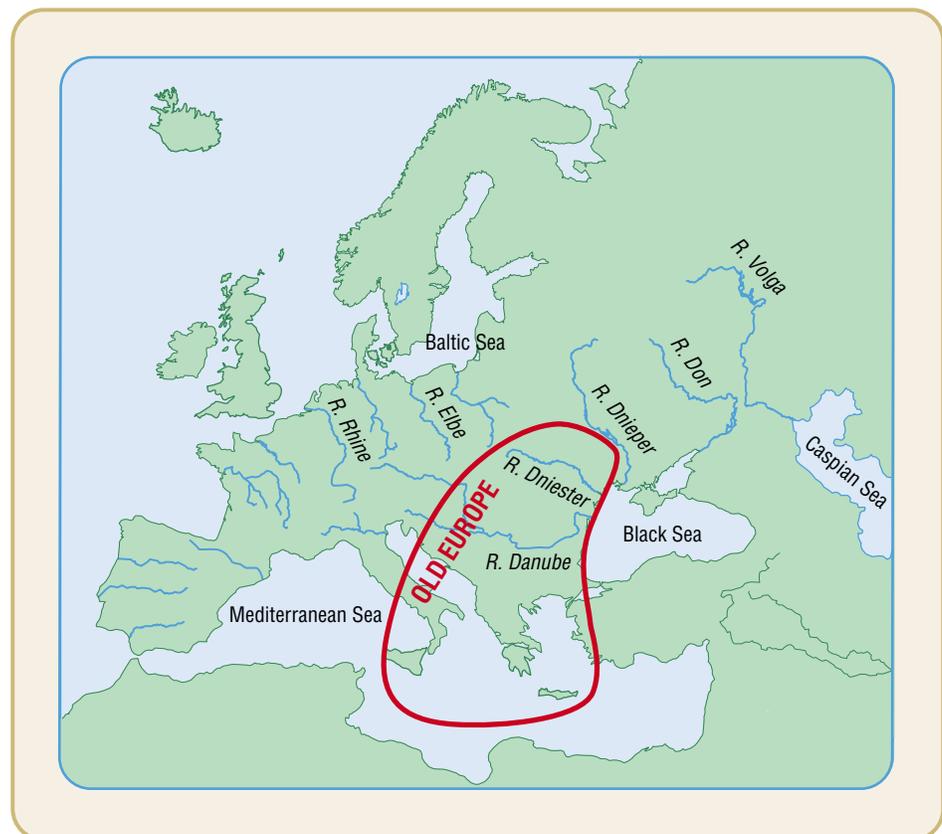
Contrary to what essentialists say, men have not always enjoyed much more power and authority than women. Substantial inequality between women and men has existed for only about 6,000 years. It was socially constructed. Three major sociohistorical processes account for the growth of gender inequality. Let us briefly consider each of them.

### Long-Distance Warfare and Conquest

The anthropological record suggests that women and men were about equal in status in nomadic hunting-and-gathering societies, the dominant form of society for 90% of human history. Rough gender equality was based on the fact that women produced a substantial amount of the band's food, up to 80% in some cases (see Chapter 12, "Families"). The archeological record from "Old Europe" tells a similar story. Old Europe is a region stretching roughly from Poland in the north to the Mediterranean island of Crete in the south, and from Switzerland in the west to Bulgaria in the east (see Figure 9.3). Between 7,000 and 3,500 B.C.E., men and women enjoyed approximately equal status throughout the region. In fact, the religions of the region gave primacy to fertility and creator goddesses. Kinship was traced through the mother's side of the family. Then, sometime

♦ **FIGURE 9.3** ♦  
Old Europe

SOURCE: Gimbutas (1982:16).





Women's domestic role was idealized in the 19th century.

between 4,300 and 4,200 B.C.E., all this began to change. Old Europe was invaded by successive waves of warring peoples from the Asiatic and European northeast (the Kurgans) and the deserts to the south (the Semites). Both the Kurgan and Semitic civilizations were based on a steeply hierarchical social structure in which men were dominant. Their religions gave primacy to male warrior gods. They acquired property and slaves by conquering other peoples and imposed their religions on the vanquished. They eliminated, or at least downgraded, goddesses as divine powers. God became a male who willed that men should rule women. Laws reinforced women's sexual, economic, and political subjugation to men. Traditional Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all embody ideas of male dominance, and they all derive from the tribes who conquered Old Europe in the fifth millennium B.C.E. (Eisler, 1995 [1987]; see also Lerner, 1986).

### Plow Agriculture

Long-distance warfare and conquest catered to men's strengths and so greatly enhanced male power and authority. Large-scale farming using plows harnessed to animals had much the same effect. Plow agriculture originated in the Middle East around 5,000 years ago. It required that strong adults remain in the fields all day for much of the year. It also reinforced the principle of private ownership of land. Since men were on average stronger than women, and since women were restricted in their activities by pregnancy, nursing, and childbirth, plow agriculture made men more powerful socially. Thus, land was owned by men and ownership was typically passed from father to eldest son (Coontz and Henderson, 1986).

### The Separation of Public and Private Spheres

In the agricultural era, economic production was organized around the household. Men may have worked apart from women in the fields, but the fields were still part of the *family* farm. In contrast, during the early phase of industrialization, men's work moved out of the household and into the factory and the office. Most men became wage or salary workers. Some

men assumed decision-making roles in economic and political institutions. Yet while men went public, most women remained in the domestic or private sphere. The idea soon developed that this was a natural division of labor. This idea persisted until the second half of the 20th century, when a variety of social circumstances, ranging from the introduction of the birth control pill to women's demands for entry into college, finally allowed women to enter the public sphere in large numbers.

So we see that, according to social constructionists, gender inequality derives not from any inherent biological features of men and women but from three main sociohistorical circumstances: the arrival of long-distance warfare and conquest, the development of plow agriculture, and the assignment of women to the domestic sphere and men to the public sphere during the early industrial era.

### The Earnings Gap Today

After reading this brief historical overview, you might be inclined to dismiss gender inequality as a thing of the past. If so, your decision would be hasty. That is evident if we focus first on the earnings gap between men and women, one of the most important expressions of gender inequality today. In the first quarter of 2000, women over the age of 15 working full-time in the paid labor force earned only 78.3% of what men earned (United States Department of Labor, 2000b). Four main factors contribute to the gender gap in earnings. Let us consider each of them in turn (Bianchi and Spain, 1996; England, 1992).

*Gender discrimination.* In February 1985, when Microsoft, the software giant, employed about 1,000 people, it hired its first two female executives. According to a well-placed source who was involved in the hiring, both women got their jobs because Microsoft was trying to win a United States Air Force contract. Under the government's guidelines, it didn't have enough women in top management positions to qualify. The source quotes then 29-year-old Bill Gates, President of Microsoft, as saying: "Well, let's hire two women because we can pay them half as much as we will have to pay a man, and we can give them all this other 'crap' work to do because they are women" (quoted in Wallace and Erickson, 1992: 291).

This incident is a clear illustration of **gender discrimination**, rewarding women and men differently for the same work. Gender discrimination has been illegal in the United States since 1964. It has not disappeared, as the above anecdote confirms. However, anti-discrimination laws have helped to increase the **female–male earnings ratio**, that is, women's earnings as a percentage of men's earnings. The female–male earnings ratio increased 17.3% between 1960 and 2000. At that rate of improvement, women will be earning as much as men by 2050, around the time most first-year college students today retire (calculated from Feminist.com, 1999; United States Department of Labor, 2000b).

*Heavy domestic responsibilities reduce women's earnings.* Raising children can be one of the most emotionally satisfying experiences in life. However, it is so exhausting and time-consuming, and requires so many interruptions due to pregnancy and illness, it substantially decreases the time one can spend getting training and doing paid work. Since women are disproportionately involved in child rearing, they suffer the brunt of this economic reality. Women also do more housework and elderly care than men. Specifically, in most countries, including the United States, women do between two thirds and three quarters of all unpaid child care, housework, and care for the elderly (Boyd, 1997: 55). As a result, they devote fewer hours to paid work than men, experience more labor-force interruptions, and are more likely than men to take part-time jobs. Part-time jobs pay less per hour and offer fewer benefits than full-time work. Even when they work full-time in the paid labor force, women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities, working, in effect, a "double shift" (Hochschild with Machung, 1989; see Chapter 12, "Families"). This affects how much time they can devote to their jobs and careers, with negative consequences for their earnings (Mahony, 1995; Waldfogel, 1997).

*Women tend to be concentrated in low-wage occupations and industries.* The third factor leading to lower earnings for women is that the courses they select in high school and college tend to limit them to jobs in low-wage occupations and industries. Thus,



Although women have entered many traditionally “male” occupations since the 1970s, they are still concentrated in lower paying clerical and service occupations and underrepresented in higher paying manual occupations.

Occupation	% Women, 1975	% Women, 1995
Managerial and professional		
Executive, administrative, and managerial	21.9	42.7
Professional	45.3	52.9
Technical, sales, and administrative support		
Technicians and related support	41.5	51.4
Sales	41.9	49.5
Administrative support, including clerical	77.2	79.5
Service		
Private household	97.5	95.5
Protective service	7.1	15.9
Other service	64.4	65.0
Precision production, craft, and repair	5.5	8.9
Operators, fabricators, and laborers		
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	38.7	37.3
Transportation and material moving	4.8	9.5
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	16.9	19.1
Farming, forestry, and fishing	14.0	19.9
TOTAL	39.6	46.1

◆ **TABLE 9.4** ◆  
**Women as a Percentage of  
 Total Employed by Broad  
 Occupational Division,  
 United States, 1975 and 1995**

SOURCE: Wooton (1997: 17).

although women have made big strides since the 1970s, especially in managerial employment, they are still concentrated in lower paying clerical and service occupations and underrepresented in higher paying manual occupations (see Table 9.4). For example, over 95% of the people who provide private household services are women, compared to about 43% of the people with executive, administrative, and managerial jobs. Moreover, *within* the broad occupational divisions listed in Table 9.4, lower earnings are associated with occupations where women are concentrated (Hesse-Biber and Carter, 2000: 114–73).

*Work done by women is commonly considered less valuable than work done by men because it is viewed as involving fewer skills.* Finally, women tend to earn less than men because the skills involved in their work are often undervalued (Figart and Lapidus, 1996; Sorenson, 1994). Compare office machine repair technicians, 94.1% of whom were men in

1997, with prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, 97.6% of whom were women. The man who repaired photocopiers earned an average of \$548 a week while the woman who taught and played with 5-year-olds earned an average of \$405 (United States Department of Labor, 1998a). It is, however, questionable whether it takes less training and skill to teach a young child the basics of counting and reading and cooperation and sharing than it takes to get a photocopier to collate paper properly. As this example suggests, we apply somewhat arbitrary standards to reward different occupational roles. In our society, these standards systematically undervalue the kind of skills needed for jobs where women are concentrated.

We thus see that the gender gap in earnings is based on several *social* circumstances rather than any inherent difference between women and men. This means that people can reduce the gender gap if they want to. Below, we discuss social policies that could create more equality between women and men. But first, to stress the urgency of such policies, we explain how the persistence of gender inequality encourages sexual harassment and rape.

### Male Aggression Against Women

Serious acts of aggression between men and women are common. The great majority are committed by men against women. For example, in 1995, more than 340,000 rapes and sexual assaults were reported to the police in the United States. More than 90% of the victims were women, and nearly all the perpetrators were men (Maguire and Pastore, 1998: 198, 181). Among young singles, the rate of rape is higher than in the population as a whole. Thus, in a survey of acquaintance and date rape in American colleges, 7% of men admitted they attempted or committed rape in the past year. Eleven percent of women said they were victims of attempted or successful rape (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski, 1987).

Why do men commit more frequent (and more harmful) acts of aggression against women than women commit against men? It is *not* because men on average are *physically* more powerful than women. Greater physical power is more likely to be used to commit acts of aggression when norms justify male domination and men have much more *social* power than women. When women and men are more equal socially, and norms justify gender equality, the rate of male aggression against women is lower. This is evident if we consider various types of aggressive interaction, including rape and sexual harassment (see also the discussion of wife abuse in Chapter 12, “Families”).



**Web Research Projects**  
Marital Rape

### Rape

Some people think rapists are men who suffer a psychological disorder that compels them to achieve immediate sexual gratification even if violence is required. Others think rape occurs because of flawed communication. They believe some rape victims give mixed signals to their assailants by, for example, drinking too much and flirting with them.

Such explanations are not completely invalid. Interviews with victims and perpetrators show that some rapists do suffer from psychological disorders. Other offenders do misinterpret signals in what they regard as sexually ambiguous situations (Hannon, Hall, Kuntz, Van Laar, and Williams, 1995). But such cases account for only a small proportion of the total. Men who rape women are rarely mentally disturbed, and it is abundantly clear to most assailants that they are doing something their victims strongly oppose.

What then accounts for rape being as common as it is? A sociological answer is suggested by the fact that rape is sometimes not about sexual gratification at all. Some rapists cannot ejaculate. Some cannot even achieve an erection. Significantly, however, all rape involves domination and humiliation as principal motives. It is not surprising, therefore, that some rapists are men who were physically or sexually abused in their youth. They develop a deep need to feel powerful as psychological compensation for their early powerlessness. Other rapists are men who, as children, saw their mothers as potentially hostile figures who needed to be controlled, or as mere objects available for male gratification. They saw their fathers as emotionally cold and distant. Raised in such an atmosphere, rapists learn not to empathize with women. Instead, they learn to want to dominate them (Lisak, 1992).

Psychological factors aside, certain *social* situations also increase the rate of rape. One such situation is war. In war, conquering male soldiers often feel justified in wanting to humiliate the vanquished, who are powerless to stop them. Rape is often used for this



A San Francisco billboard suggests men still need reminding that no means no.

purpose, as was especially well documented in the ethnic wars that accompanied the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Human Rights Watch, 1995).

Aggressiveness is also a necessary and important part of police work. Spousal abuse is therefore common among police officers. One United States study found that 37% of anonymously interviewed police wives reported spousal abuse. Several other surveys of police officers put the figure in the 40% range (Roslin, 2000). "It's a horrible, horrible problem," says Penny Harrington, former chief of police in Portland, Oregon, and now head of the Los Angeles–based National Center for Women and Policing. "Close to half of all 911 calls are due to family violence," says Harrington. "If the statistics are true, you've got a two-in-five chance of getting a batterer coming to answer your call" (quoted in Roslin, 2000: 46).

The relationship between male dominance and rape is also evident in research on college fraternities. Many college fraternities tend to emphasize male dominance and aggression as a central part of their culture. Thus, sociologists who have interviewed fraternity members have shown that most fraternities try to recruit members who can reinforce a macho image and avoid any suggestion of effeminacy and homosexuality. Research also shows that fraternity houses that are especially prone to rape tend to sponsor parties that treat women in a particularly degrading way. Thus, by emphasizing a very narrow and aggressive form of masculinity, some fraternities tend to facilitate rape on college campuses (Boswell and Spade, 1996; Martin and Hummer, 1989; Sanday, 1990).

Another social circumstance that increases the likelihood of rape is participation in athletics. Of course, the overwhelming majority of athletes are not rapists. However, there are proportionately more rapists among men who participate in athletics than among nonathletes (Welch, 1997). That is because many sports embody a particular vision of masculinity in North American culture: competitive, aggressive, and domineering. By recruiting men who display these characteristics and by encouraging the development of these characteristics in athletes, sports can contribute to "off-field" aggression, including sexual aggression. Furthermore, among male athletes, there is a distinct hierarchy of sexual aggression. Male athletes who engage in contact sports are more prone to be rapists than other athletes. There are proportionately even more rapists among athletes involved in collision and combative sports, notably football (Welch, 1997).

Rape, we conclude, involves using sex to establish dominance. The incidence of rape is highest in situations where early socialization experiences predispose men to want to control women, where norms justify the domination of women, and where a big power imbalance between men and women exists.

## Sexual Harassment

There are two types of sexual harassment. **Quid pro quo harassment** takes place when sexual threats or bribery are made a condition of employment decisions. (The Latin phrase “quid pro quo” means “something for something.”) **Hostile environment harassment** involves sexual jokes, comments, and touching that interferes with work or creates an unfriendly work setting. Research suggests that relatively powerless women are the most likely to be sexually harassed. Moreover, sexual harassment is most common in work settings that exhibit high levels of gender inequality and a culture justifying male domination of women. Specifically, women who are young, unmarried, and employed in nonprofessional jobs are most likely to become objects of sexual harassment, particularly if they are temporary workers, the ratio of women to men in the workplace is low, and the organizational culture of the workplace tolerates sexual harassment (Rogers and Henson, 1997; Welsh, 1999).

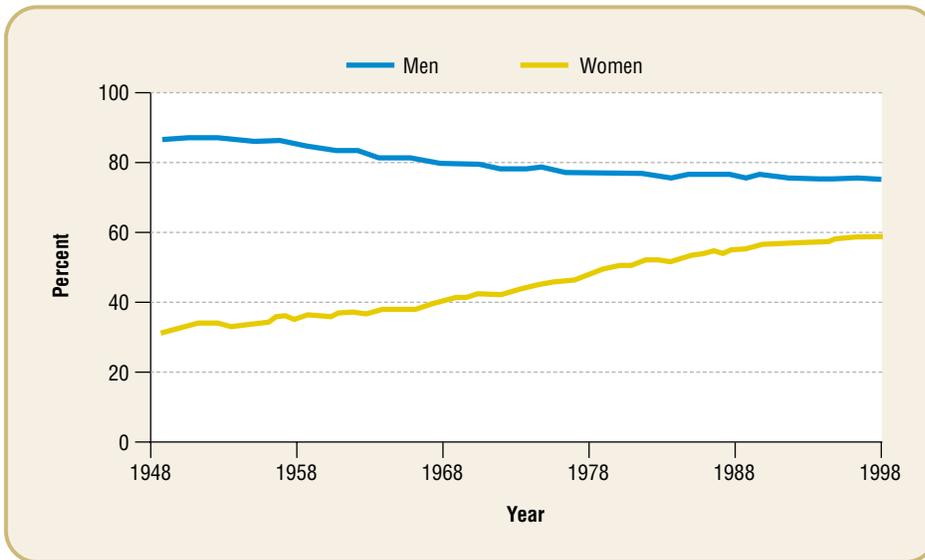
Ultimately, then, male aggression against women, including sexual harassment and rape, is encouraged by a lesson most of us still learn at home, in school, at work, through much of organized religion, and in the mass media—that it is natural and right for men to dominate women. To be sure, recent decades have witnessed important changes in the way women’s and men’s roles are defined. Nevertheless, in the world of paid work, in the household, in government, and in all other spheres of life, men still tend to command substantially more power and authority than women. Daily patterns of gender domination, viewed as legitimate by most people, get built into our courtship, sexual, family, and work norms. From this point of view, male aggression against women is simply an expression of male authority by other means.

This does not mean that all men endorse the principle of male dominance, much less that all men are inclined to rape or engage in other acts of aggression against women. Many men favor gender equality, and most men never rape or abuse a woman. However, the fact remains that many aspects of our culture legitimize male dominance, making it seem valid or proper. For example, pornography, jokes at the expense of women, and whistling and leering at women might seem mere examples of harmless play. At a subtler, sociological level, however, they are assertions of the appropriateness of women’s submission to men. Such frequent and routine reinforcements of male authority increase the likelihood that some men will consider it their right to assault women physically or sexually if the opportunity to do so exists or can be created. “Just kidding” has a cost. For instance, researchers have found that college men who enjoy sexist jokes are most likely to report engaging in acts of sexual aggression against women (Ryan and Kanjorski, 1998).

We thus see that male aggression against women and gender inequality are not separate issues. Gender inequality is the foundation of aggression against women. In concluding this chapter, we consider how gender inequality can be decreased in the coming decades. As we proceed, you should bear in mind that gender equality is not just a matter of justice. It is also a question of safety.

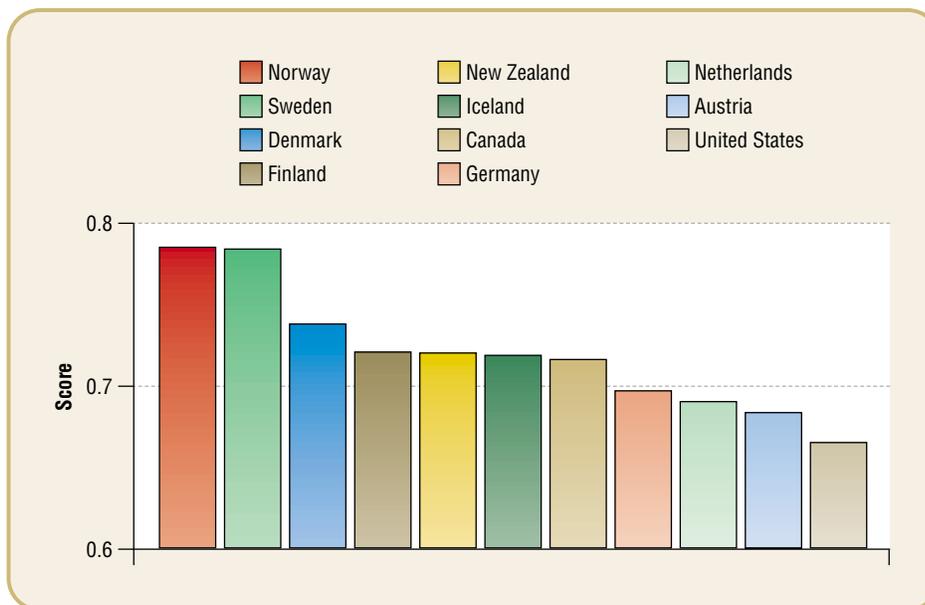
## Toward 2050

The 20th century witnessed growing equality between women and men in many countries. In the United States, the decline of the family farm made children less economically useful and more costly to raise. As a result, women started having fewer children. The industrialization of America, and then the growth of the economy’s service sector, increased demand for women in the paid labor force (see Figure 9.4). This gave them substantially more economic power and also encouraged them to have fewer children. The legalization and availability of contraception made it possible for women to exercise unprecedented control over their own bodies. The women’s movement fought for, and won, increased rights for women on a number of economic, political, and legal fronts. All these forces brought about a massive cultural shift, a fundamental reorientation of thinking on the part of many Americans about what women could and should do in society.



◆ **FIGURE 9.4** ◆  
**Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex, United States, 1948-1999 (in percent)**

Note: Figures are expressed as percent of men and women 16 years of age and over. The 1999 figure is for March only.  
 SOURCE: United States Department of Labor (1998b; 1999b).



◆ **FIGURE 9.5** ◆  
**Countries With Highest Scores on Gender Empowerment Measure, 1998**

SOURCE: United Nations Development Program (1999).

One indicator of the progress of women is the “Gender Empowerment Measure” (GEM). The GEM is computed by the United Nations. It takes into account women’s share of seats in parliament (the House of Representatives in the United States), women’s share of administrative, managerial, professional, and technical jobs, and women’s earning power. A score of 1.0 indicates equality with men on these three dimensions.

As Figure 9.5 shows, the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland) were the most gender-egalitarian countries in the world in 1998. They had GEM scores ranging from 0.725 to 0.79. This means Scandinavian women are about three quarters of the way to equality with men on the three dimensions tapped by the GEM. The United States ranked 11th in the world with a GEM score of .675. This means American women are about two thirds of the way to equality with men.

In general, there is more gender equality in rich than in poor countries. Thus, the top 11 countries, shown in Figure 9.5, are all rich. In contrast, the lowest GEM scores are found in the poor countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This suggests gender equality is a function of economic development.



However, our analysis of the GEM data suggests that there are some exceptions to the general pattern. They show gender equality is also a function of government policy. Thus, in some of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe (such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Latvia) gender equality is *higher* than one would expect given their level of economic development. Meanwhile, in some of the Islamic countries (such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria), gender equality is *lower* than one would expect given their level of economic development. These anomalies exist because the former communist countries made gender equality a matter of public policy while many Islamic countries do just the opposite. To cite just one extreme case, in 1996 authorities in the Islamic country of Afghanistan made it illegal for girls to attend school and women to work in the paid labor force. (The situation has improved since the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001.)

The GEM figures suggest American women still have a long way to go before they achieve equality with men. We have seen, for example, that the gender gap in earnings is shrinking but will disappear only in 2050—and then only if it continues to diminish at the 1960–2000 rate. That is a big “if,” because progress is never automatic.

In 1963, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act. It requires equal pay for the same work. Soon after, Congress passed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. It prohibits employers from discriminating against women. These laws were important first steps in diminishing the gender gap in earnings. Since the mid-1960s, people in favor of closing the gender gap have recognized that we need additional laws and social programs to create gender equality.

Socializing children at home and in school to understand that women and men are equally adept at all jobs is important in motivating girls to excel in nontraditional fields. **Affirmative action**, which involves hiring more qualified women to diversify organizations, is important in helping to compensate for past discrimination in hiring.<sup>9</sup> However, without in any way belittling the need for such initiatives, we should recognize their impact will be muted if women continue to undertake disproportionate domestic responsibilities and if occupations containing a high concentration of women continue to be undervalued in money terms.

Two main policy initiatives will probably be required in coming decades to bridge the gender gap in earnings. One is the development of a better child care system. The other is the development of a policy of comparable worth. Let us consider both these issues in turn.

## Child Care

High-quality, government-subsidized, affordable child care is widely available in most Western European countries, but not in the United States (see Chapter 12, “Families”). As a result, many American women with small children are either unable to work outside the home or able to work outside the home only on a part-time basis.

For women who have small children and work outside the home, child care options and the quality of child care vary by social class (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998; Gormley, 1995; Murdoch, 1995). Affluent Americans can afford to hire nannies and send their young children to expensive day-care facilities that enjoy a stable, relatively well-paid, well-trained staff and a high ratio of caregivers to children. These features yield high-quality child care. In contrast, the day-care centers, nursery schools, and preschools to which middle-class Americans typically send their children have higher staff turnover, relatively poorly paid, poorly trained staff, and a lower ratio of caregivers to children. Fewer than a third of American children in child care attend such facilities, however. More than two thirds—mainly from lower middle-class and poor families—use family child care homes or rely on the generosity of extended family members or neighbors. Overall, the quality of child care is lowest in family child care homes.

A third of all day-care facilities in the United States do not meet children’s basic health and safety needs. This is true of about 12% of day-care centers, 13% of family child

<sup>9</sup>Affirmative action has also been applied to other groups that experience high levels of discrimination, such as African, Native, and Hispanic Americans.

care providers regulated by government, and 50% of family child care providers unregulated by government (calculated from Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1998; Gormley, 1995; Murdoch, 1995). In 1997, veterinary assistants earned a median wage of \$7.34 an hour, parking lot attendants \$6.38, and child care workers \$6.12. One interpretation of these figures is that our society considers tending pets and cars more important than looking after young children.

The welfare-to-day-care initiative recently taken by 29 states adds weight to this interpretation. Governments throughout the country recognize the crisis in child care. They also want to get people off welfare and into the work force. So, in 1997, they began recruiting thousands of welfare mothers to start at-home, for-profit day-care facilities, thus hoping to kill two birds—welfare and child care—with one stone. But these welfare mothers were given few resources and little training. Most of them have little formal education and live in substandard housing. Many of them could undoubtedly make good child care providers. That, however, would require years of training, substantial subsidies, and ongoing support from outside sources (Dickerson, 1998).

Many companies, schools, and religious organizations in the United States provide high-quality day care. However, until the situation described above changes, women, particularly those in the middle and lower classes, will continue to suffer economically from the lack of accessible, affordable day care.

### Comparable Worth

In the 1980s, researchers found women earn less than men partly because jobs in which women are concentrated are valued less than jobs in which men are concentrated. They therefore tried to establish gender-neutral standards by which they could judge the dollar value of work. These standards include such factors as the education and experience required to do a particular job and the level of responsibility, amount of stress, and working conditions associated with it. Researchers felt that, by using these criteria to compare jobs in which women and men are concentrated, they could identify pay inequities. The underpaid could then be compensated accordingly. In other words, women and men would receive equal pay for jobs of **comparable worth**, even if they did different jobs.

A number of United States states have adopted laws requiring equal pay for work of comparable worth. Minnesota leads the country in this regard. However, the laws do not apply to most employers (“Comparable Worth . . .,” 1990). Moreover, some comparable-worth assessments have been challenged in the courts. The courts have been reluctant to agree that the devaluation of jobs in which women are concentrated is a form of discrimination (England, 1992: 250). Only broad, new federal legislation is likely to change this state of affairs. However, no federal legislation on comparable worth is on the drawing boards. Most business leaders seem opposed to such laws since their implementation would cost them many billions of dollars.

## THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Improvements in the social standing of women do not depend just on the sympathy of government and business leaders. Progress on this front has always depended in part on the strength of the organized women's movement. This is likely to be true in the future too. In concluding this chapter, it is therefore fitting to consider the state of the women's movement and its prospects.

The “first wave” of the women's movement emerged in the 1840s. Drawing a parallel between the oppression of black slaves and the oppression of women, first-wave feminists made a number of demands, chief among them the right to vote. They finally achieved that goal in 1920, the result of much demonstrating, lobbying, organizing, and persistent educational work.

In the mid-1960s, the “second wave” of the women's movement started to grow. Second-wave feminists were inspired in part by the successes of the civil rights movement.

The “first wave” of the women’s movement emerged in the 1840s. The movement achieved its main goal—the right to vote for women—in 1920 as a result of much demonstrating, lobbying, organizing, and persistent educational work.



They felt that women’s concerns were largely ignored in American society despite persistent and pervasive gender inequality. Like their counterparts more than a century earlier, they held demonstrations, lobbied politicians, and formed women’s organizations to further their cause. They advocated equal rights with men in education and employment, the elimination of sexual violence, and women’s control over reproduction. One focus of their activities was mobilizing support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) of the Constitution. The ERA stipulates equal rights for men and women under the law. The ERA was approved by the House of Representatives in 1971 and the Senate in 1972. However, it fell 3 states short of the 38 needed for ratification in 1982. Since then, no further attempt has been made to ratify the ERA.

Beyond the basic points of agreement noted above, there is considerable intellectual diversity in the modern feminist movement concerning ultimate goals. Three main streams may be distinguished (Tong, 1989).

*Liberal feminism* is the most popular current in the women’s movement today. Its advocates believe the main sources of women’s subordination are learned gender roles and the denial of opportunities to women. Liberal feminists advocate nonsexist methods of socialization and education, more sharing of domestic tasks between women and men, and extending to women all the educational, employment, and political rights and privileges men enjoy.

*Socialist feminists* regard women’s relationship to the economy as the main source of women’s disadvantages. They believe the traditional nuclear family emerged along with inequalities of wealth. In their opinion, once men possessed wealth, they wanted to ensure their property would be transmitted to their children, particularly their sons. They accomplished this in two ways. First, men exercised complete economic control over their property, thus ensuring it would not be squandered and would remain theirs and theirs alone. Second, they enforced female monogamy, thus ensuring their property would be transmitted only to *their* offspring. Thus, according to socialist feminists, the economic and sexual oppression of women has its roots in capitalism. Socialist feminists also assert that the reforms proposed by liberal feminists are inadequate. That is because they can do little to help working-class women, who are too poor to take advantage of equal educational and work opportunities. Socialist feminists conclude that only the elimination of private property and the creation of economic equality can bring about an end to the oppression of all women.

*Radical feminists*, in turn, find the reforms proposed by liberals and the revolution proposed by socialists inadequate. Patriarchy—male domination and norms justifying that domination—is more deeply rooted than capitalism, say the radical feminists. After all, patriarchy predates capitalism. Moreover, it is just as evident in self-proclaimed communist societies as it is in capitalist societies. Radical feminists conclude that the very idea of gender must be changed to bring an end to male domination. Some radical feminists argued that new reproductive technologies, such as *in vitro* fertilization, are bound to be helpful in this regard because they can break the link between women's bodies and childbearing (see Chapter 12, "Families"). But the revolution envisaged by radical feminists goes beyond the realm of reproduction to include all aspects of male sexual dominance. From their point of view, pornography, sexual harassment, restrictive contraception, rape, incest, sterilization, and physical assault must be eliminated in order for women to reconstruct their sexuality on their own terms.

This thumbnail sketch by no means exhausts the variety of streams of contemporary feminist thought. For example, since the mid-1980s, *antiracist* and *postmodernist* feminists have criticized liberal, socialist, and radical feminists for generalizing from the experience of white women and failing to see how women's lives are rooted in particular historical and racial experiences (hooks, 1984). These new currents have done much to extend the relevance of feminism to previously marginalized groups.

Partly due to the political and intellectual vigor of the women's movement, some feminist ideas have gained widespread acceptance in American society over the past three decades (see Table 9.5). For example, 1998 General Social Survey data show that 83% of Americans approve of married women working in the paid labor force. Some 78% think women are as well suited to politics as men. And 64% regard women's rights issues as important or very important. Support for these ideas has grown in recent decades. Still, many people, especially men, oppose the women's movement. In fact, in recent years several antifeminist men's groups have sprung up to defend traditional male privileges.<sup>10</sup> It is apparently difficult for some men to accept feminism because they feel that the social changes advocated by feminists threaten their traditional way of life and perhaps even their sexual identity.



The "second wave" of the women's movement started to grow in the mid-1960s. Members of the movement advocated equal rights with men in education and employment, the elimination of sexual violence, and women's control over reproduction.

<sup>10</sup>Profeminist men's groups, such as the National Organization for Men Against Sexism, also exist but seem to have a smaller membership (National Organization . . . , 2000).

◆ **TABLE 9.5** ◆  
**Attitudes To Women's Issues,**  
**United States, 1972–96**  
**(in percent)**

SOURCE: National Opinion Research Center (1999).

	1972–82	1983–87	1996
Approve of married women working in paid labor force	70	80	83
Women suited for politics	54	63	78
Women's rights issue one of the most important/important	—	58	64
Favor preferential hiring of women	—	—	27
Think of him/herself as a feminist	—	—	22
Women can best improve their position through women's rights groups	—	15	—



Our own experience suggests that traditional patterns of gender socialization weigh heavily on many men. For example, John Lie grew up in a patriarchal household. His father worked outside the home, and his mother stayed home to do nearly all the housework and child care. “I remember my grandfather telling me that a man should never be seen in the kitchen,” recalls John, “and it is a lesson I learned well. In fact, everything about my upbringing—the division of labor in my family, the games I played, the TV programs I watched—prepared me for the life of a patriarch. I vaguely remember seeing members of the ‘women’s liberation movement’ staging demonstrations on the TV news in the early 1970s. Although I was only about 11 or 12 years old, I recall dismissing them as slightly crazed, bra-burning man haters. Because of the way I grew up and what I read, heard, and saw, I assumed the existing gender division of labor was natural. Doctors, pilots, and professors should be men, I thought, and people in the ‘caring’ professions, such as nurses and teachers, should be women.

“But socialization is not destiny,” John insists. “Entirely by chance, when I got to college I took some courses taught by female professors. It is embarrassing to say so now, but I was surprised that they were so much brighter, more animated, and more enlightening than my male high school teachers had been. In fact, I soon realized that many of my best professors were women. I think this is one reason why I decided to take the first general course in women’s studies offered at my university. It was an eye opener. I soon became convinced that gender inequalities are about as natural and inevitable as racial inequalities. I also came to believe that gender equality could be as enriching for men as for women. Sociological reflection overturned what my socialization had taught me. Sociology promised—and delivered. I think many college-educated men have similar experiences today, and I hope I now contribute to their enlightenment.”

## SUMMARY

1. The way culturally appropriate masculine and feminine roles are expressed depends on a variety of social conditions, especially the level of gender inequality.
2. Males and females are channeled into gender-appropriate roles by parents, teachers, and the mass media.
3. While society pushes people to assume conventionally masculine or feminine roles, it demands heterosexuality with even greater force.
4. The social distinction between men and women serves as a major basis of inequality in the family and the workplace.
5. The gender gap in earnings derives from outright discrimination against women, women’s disproportionate domestic responsibilities, women’s concentration in low-wage occupations and industries, and the undervaluation of work typically done by women.
6. Male aggression against women is rooted in gender inequality.
7. Among the major reforms that can help eliminate the gender gap in earnings and reduce the overall level and expression of gender inequality are (a) the development of an affordable, accessible system of high-quality day care; and (b) the remuneration of men and women on the basis of their work’s actual worth.



### Recommended Web Sites

For a useful list of resources on gender and sexuality on the World Wide Web, go to <http://www.georgetown.edu/crossroads/asw/gender.html>.

The National Committee on Pay Equity is a coalition of more than 180 organizations working to eliminate sex- and race-based wage discrimination and to achieve pay equity. Visit their Web site at <http://www.feminist.com/fairpay>.

On the United Nations Gender Empowerment Measure, discussed in the text, see <http://www.undp.org/hdro/98gem.htm>.

In 1997, a conference was held in San Diego to analyze what the participants called the “National Sex Panic.” For the proceedings of the conference on RealAudio, go to <http://www.managingdesire.org/sexpanic/sexpanicindex.html>.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

Deborah Blum. *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences Between Men and Women* (New York: Penguin, 1997). The subtitle is a misnomer. This Pulitzer-Prize-winning science writer discusses not just the biological differences between men and women but the interaction between biology and environment.

Riane Eisler. *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995 [1987]). The big picture on gender inequality. Eisler’s brilliant examination of the archeological record uncovers the historical origins of gender in-

equality and suggests that now, for the first time in 7,000 years, we are in a position to put an end to it.

Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Gregg Lee Carter. *Working Women in America: Split Dreams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). A clear, brief, and comprehensive overview of how family, school, the mass media, and the economy intersect and structure women’s work and aspirations in the paid labor force and the family.