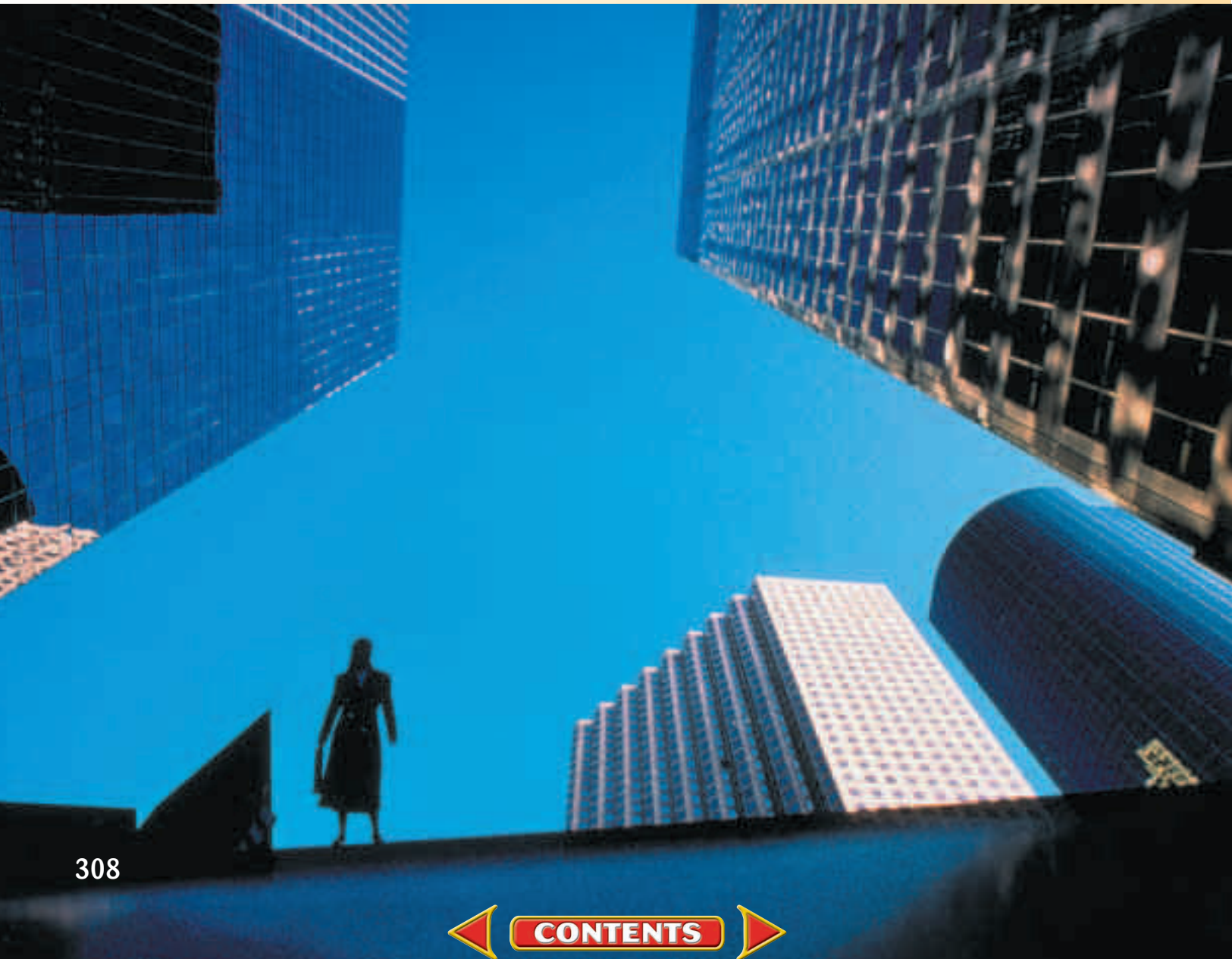# CHAPTER 10

Inequalities of Gender and Age

Your Sociological Imagination

True or false? Women in the United States lead the world in efforts to achieve job equality with men.

Did you answer "true" to this statement? If so, you may be interested in the following facts. Among industrialized nations, America is surprisingly near the bottom of the list in ranking male/female income equality. Only Luxembourg and Japan have wider gaps than the United States between what men and women earn for doing the same work. Swedish women in manufacturing jobs, for example, earn about 90 percent of the wages paid men, while females in the United States earn only 72 percent of the wages paid men for the same work (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000a).

Throughout history, men have dominated the social, political, and economic spheres outside the home. Traditionally, women have assumed responsibility for child care and household tasks. These domestic tasks are generally undervalued in industrial societies, where a person's contributions to society are pegged to monetary rewards. Women—thought to be dependent, passive, and deferring—have usually been considered subordinate to independent, aggressive, and strong men. This division of labor based on sex has almost always led to gender inequality.

This chapter examines how various cultures view gender roles and also how America looks at its aged population.

Sections

1. **Sex and Gender Identity**
2. **Theoretical Perspectives on Gender**
3. **Gender Inequality**
4. **Ageism**
5. **Inequality in America's Elderly Population**

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

❖ distinguish the concepts of sex, gender, and gender identity.
❖ summarize the perspectives on gender taken by functionalists, conflict theorists, and symbolic interactionists.
❖ describe the status of women in the United States.
❖ compare and contrast the ways in which functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism approach ageism.
❖ discuss the inequality experienced by America's elderly.

SOCIOLOGY Online

Chapter Overview
Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at soc.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 10—Chapter Overviews** to preview chapter information.

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Sex and Gender Identity

Key Terms

- **sex**
- **biological determinism**
- **gender identity**

Section Preview

All societies expect people to behave in certain ways based on their sex. Through socialization, members of a society acquire an awareness of themselves as masculine or feminine. Behavioral differences between men and women are culturally conditioned.

Defining Male and Female

What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice
And everything nice
That's what little girls are made of.

What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails
And puppy dog tails
That's what little boys are made of.

As the above well-known nursery rhyme indicates, when it comes to males and females, most Americans believe that anatomy is destiny. If men and women behave differently, it is assumed to be because of their **sex**— the biological distinction between male and female. Males are assumed to be naturally more aggressive than women and to be built for providing and protecting. Thought of as being naturally more passive, females are believed to be designed for domestic work. If this popular conception were true, men

sex
classification of people as male or female based on biological characteristics

Many Americans believe that infant boys are just naturally more active than infant girls. Would you agree or not?

and women in all societies would behave uniformly in their unique ways be-cause of inborn biological forces beyond their control. This way of thinking is called **biological determinism**—the belief that behavioral differences are the result of inherited physical characteristics.

The theory of biological determinism lacks scientific proof. Significant be-havioral differences between men and women have not been causally linked to biological characteristics. Although biology may create some behavioral tendencies in the sexes, such tendencies are so weak that they are easily over-ridden by cultural and social influences (Ridley, 1996; Sapolsky, 1997).

From the moment of birth—on the basis of obvious external biological characteristics—males and females are treated differently. Few parents in American society point with pride to the muscular legs and broad shoulders of their baby girls or to the long eyelashes, rosebud mouth, and delicate curly hair of their baby boys. Rather, parents stress the characteristics and behaviors that fit the society's image of the ideal male or female, including modes of dress, ways of walking, manner of talking, play activities, and life aspirations.
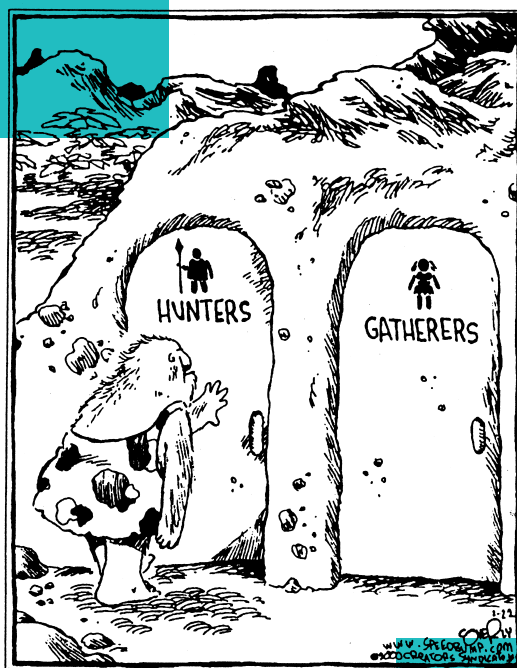
Girls and boys gradually learn to behave as their parents expect. From this process comes **gender identity**—an awareness of being masculine or feminine, based on culture. Sociologist Margaret Andersen succinctly cap-tured the difference between sex and gender.

> *The terms sex and gender have particular definitions in sociological work. Sex refers to the biological identity of the person and is meant to signify the fact that one is either male or female. . . . Gender refers to the socially learned behaviors and expectations that are associated with the two sexes. Thus, whereas "maleness" and "femaleness" are biologi-cal facts, becoming a woman or becoming a man is a cultural process. Like race and class, gender is a social category that establishes, in large measure, our life chances and directs our social relations with others. Sociologists dis-tinguish sex and gender to emphasize that gen-der is a cultural, not a biological, phenomenon (Andersen, 1997).*

Sociologists are part of an ongoing debate con-cerning the reasons for gen-der differences. At the heart of the debate is the so-called nature versus nurture issue: Does biology or so-cialization play a greater role in gender differences? Today, research by sociolo-gists and other investigators

Gender identities go way back.

biological determinism
principle that behavioral differences are the result of inherited physical characteristics

gender identity
a sense of being male or female based on learned cultural values

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is aimed at answering these questions scientifically. Definitions of masculinity and femininity are now based on research rather than just on tradition and "common knowledge."

Biology, Culture, and Behavior

As noted earlier, there are obvious biological differences between males and females. Biological differences between the sexes include distinctive muscle-to-bone ratios and how fat is stored. The differences in reproductive organs, however, are much more important, because they result in certain facts of life. Only men can impregnate; only women are able to produce eggs, give birth, and nurse infants. Throughout life reproductive hormones influence development in both males and females.

Are male and female brains different?   Recent research indicates that the brains of men and women are slightly different in structure (Gur et al., 1995). For example, men show more activity in a region of the brain thought to be tied to adaptive evolutionary responses such as fighting. Women have more activity in a newer, more highly developed region of the brain thought to be linked to emotional expression. The female brain is less specialized than the male brain. Women tend to use both sides of the brain simultaneously when performing a task. Whereas men tend to process verbal tasks on the left side of the brain, women are more likely to use both sides. Women tend to use both ears when listening and men tend to use the right ear.

Do such biological differences lead to differences in social behavior?   This is precisely the

Tennessee women's basketball coach Pat Summitt does not fit the popular stereotype of womanly behavior. Neither does Saturday Night Live's *"Pat" character. In fact, no one is quite sure what gender SNL Pat is, anyway.*

◀ **CONTENTS** ▶

question overlooked by biological determinists who, without evidence, assume that physical differences result in biologically programmed differences in social behavior. It is true that female babies are more sensitive to sound, probably because they listen with both ears rather than one. And male infants and children are more active in play—shouting, yelling, hitting—than females.

Biological determinists point to research that indicates men and women in dozens of different cultures (at varying stages of economic development) are associated with some distinctly different ways of behaving. For example, men and women differ in what they look for in romantic and sexual partners. Men value physical appearance more than women do. Women place more emphasis on social class and income. Men tend to prefer slightly younger mates, while women favor slightly older ones. In addition, males in general tend more toward physical aggressiveness in conflict situations (Buss, Malamuth, and Winstead, 1998).

The fact that such differences appear in many cultures suggests to some people that they have a biological cause. However, we don't yet know for sure to what extent these differences result from biology or culture, and the debate on this issue can be furious.

How do sociologists view behavior?   The majority of sociologists argue that gender-related behavior is not primarily the result of biology. They look to culture for clues. In her classic study of three primitive New Guinean peoples, anthropologist Margaret Mead (1950) demonstrated the influence of culture and socialization on gender role behavior.

Among the Arapesh, Mead found that both males and females were conditioned to be cooperative, unaggressive, and empathetic. Both men and women in this tribe behaved in a way that is consistent with the more traditional concept of the female gender role. Among the Mundugumor, in contrast, both men and women were trained to be "masculine"—they were aggressive, ruthless, and unresponsive to the needs of others. In the

Anthropologist Margaret Mead's research on primitive cultures added greatly to our knowledge of gender and human nature.

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Males have proven that they can also function successfully in careers that require a high degree of nurturing and communication skills.

Tchambuli tribe, the gender roles were the opposite of those found in Western society. Women were dominant, impersonal, and aggressive, and men were dependent and submissive.

On the basis of this evidence, Mead concluded that human nature is sufficiently flexible to rule out biological determination of gender roles. Cross-cultural research since Mead's landmark work has clearly supported her findings: gender roles are not fixed at birth (Janssen-Jurreit, 1982; Montagu, 1998).

Case studies have also been examined on infants whose parents intentionally treated their children as if they belonged to the opposite sex. Apparently, individuals can fairly easily be socialized into the gender of the opposite sex. What's more, after a few years, these children resist switching back. In general, research on gender identity indicates that biological tendencies can be greatly influenced by culture and society (Schwartz, 1987; Shapiro, 1990; Ridley, 1996; Sapolsky, 1997).

What can we conclude from studies about male and female behaviors?

In general, researchers investigating behavioral differences between the sexes have not been able to prove that any particular behavior has a biological cause. One researcher's findings tend to contradict another's.

Any conclusions we reach should also take into account several difficulties with the research. Many studies seek to find differences but ignore the overriding similarities between males and females. To make matters worse, researchers often fail to note the variation that exists *within* each sex. Some men, for example, tend to be submissive and noncompetitive, and some women are aggressive and competitive.

While biological characteristics exist, they can be modified through social influences. In other words, men and women can learn to be submissive or aggressive by mirroring the behaviors of influential role models, such as parents or siblings. Also, this is a good time to remind ourselves that human behavior is the result of multiple causes.

Section 1 Assessment

1. How is gender different from sex?

2. How are gender traits acquired?

3. Researchers investigating behavioral differences between the sexes have now proven that several significant behaviors have a biological cause. *T* or *F*?

Critical Thinking

4. **Summarizing Information** Suppose that, after your graduation, one of your teachers invites you back to speak to the class on the biological determinism versus socialization debate as it relates to gender. How would you summarize the effects that scientific research on gender has had on males and females of your generation?

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Male and female personalities are socially produced.

Margaret Mead
American anthropologist

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Another Time

Manly Hearted Women

In the northern [Native American] Plains cultures, certain women adopted elements of male social behavior, acting aggressive and domineering. The Blackfoot called them *ninauposkitzipxe,* which means literally "the manly hearted women." Women ordinarily were passive and docile, but manly hearted women were aggressive and outspoken in public affairs. At the same time they were wives and mothers and were involved in female tasks.

Manly hearted women were invariably wealthy, due in large part to their own industry. They could tan more buffalo robes and produce better quality and greater amounts of quill and beadwork than other women. Many were also medicine women, which not only enhanced their status but also brought them additional wealth. Their wealth was a key factor in their relations with men, because among the Blackfoot wealth and generosity were more highly regarded than bravery and war deeds in determining social status.

Because of their wealth and industry, manly hearted women were major economic assets to their husbands, and thus desirable wives. These same characteristics also made them independent. Within the family a manly hearted woman had an equal say, if not the dominant voice. As a Blackfoot once commented . . . , "It's easy to spot a manly hearted woman; the husband simply has nothing to say." Not only did they retain control of their own wealth, but they frequently controlled the property of their husbands as well. Because they were economically more self-sufficient than other women, many manly hearted women chose to divorce their husbands and support their children by their own industry.

Their public behavior also distinguished them. Their wealth made it possible for them always to dress in the finest clothes. Whereas other women modestly covered themselves with shawls and blankets, manly hearted women usually did not.

The Blackfoot Indians thought manly hearted women made good wives.

Whereas most women were retiring and quiet in public discussions, manly hearted women joined in and even argued with others, "just as though they were men." Whereas other women were shy at dances, manly hearted women aggressively chose their own partners. They were known for their sharp and cutting remarks, and it was said that a manly hearted woman would "take no lip" from either a man or another woman.

Source: Excerpted from James Peoples and Garrick Bailey, *Humanity* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000), pp. 164–165.

Thinking It Over

How would you use this manly hearted women story to argue that gender identity of American women is not biologically determined?

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender

Key Term

- gender socialization

Section Preview

The functionalist perspective focuses on the origins of gender differences. Conflict theory looks at the reasons gender differences continue to exist. Symbolic interactionism attempts to explain the ways in which gender is acquired.

Functionalism and Gender

Functionalists argue that any pattern of behavior that does not benefit society will become unimportant. According to functionalism, the division of responsibilities between males and females survived because it benefited human living. Early humans found that the division of labor based on sex was efficient. In part because of their size and muscular strength, men hunted and protected. In addition, men were assigned these dangerous tasks because they were more expendable than women. One male was enough to ensure that the group's chances of surviving through reproduction; one woman was not. Thus, it hurt the group's chances of survival less to lose a man.

Today, functionalists recognize that the traditional division of labor has created problems, or dysfunctions, for modern society. These dysfunctions are examined later, in the discussion on gender inequality.

This family is structured along traditional gender roles. How would the functionalist interpret this arrangement?

Conflict Theory and Gender

According to conflict theory, it is to the advantage of men to prevent women from gaining access to political, economic, and social resources. If men can prevent women from developing their potential, they can maintain

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the status quo. By keeping the traditional division of labor intact, men can preserve the privileges they enjoy.

Perhaps the most recent example of maintaining the gender status quo was found in Afghanistan, when the ruling Taliban militia practiced "gender apartheid." This gender war trapped women in a way of life unknown elsewhere in the modern world (O'Dwyer, 1999). The Taliban prohibited girls from attending school and banned women from all work outside the home. Women who left home without the protection of a male relative were punished, and the windows of houses were painted black to prevent anyone from catching a glimpse of the women. In public, women remained mute; even the soles of their shoes were soft to prevent wearers from making noise and drawing attention to themselves.

Women are moving into traditional male roles in business in greater numbers. Not everyone appears to be ready for this.

Conflict theorists see traditional gender roles as outdated. Although these conventional roles may have been appropriate in hunting and gathering, horticultural, and agricultural societies, they are inappropriate for the industrial and postindustrial era.

Male physical strength may have been important when hunting was the major means of subsistence, but work in modern society does not place men at an advantage over women in that regard. In addition, demographic characteristics make women today more available for work outside the home. Women are marrying later, are having fewer children, are younger when their last child leaves home, are remaining single in greater numbers, and are increasingly choosing to be single parents. (See Chapter 11 for more information on women and the family.) According to conflict theorists, women who prefer careers in fields formerly reserved for men have every right to make that choice, whether or not it is "functional" for society.

Symbolic Interactionism and Gender

Symbolic interactionists focus on how boys and girls learn to act the way they are "supposed to act." This process is called **gender socialization.** Gender is acquired in large part from interaction with parents, teachers, and peers. In addition, gender concepts are taught through the mass media. Indeed, the effect of the media is very powerful.

gender socialization
the social process of learning how to act as a boy or girl

How do parents contribute to gender socialization? Parents are vitally important in gender socialization because they transfer values and attitudes regarding how boys and girls should behave. The learning of gender begins at birth and is well established by the time the child is two
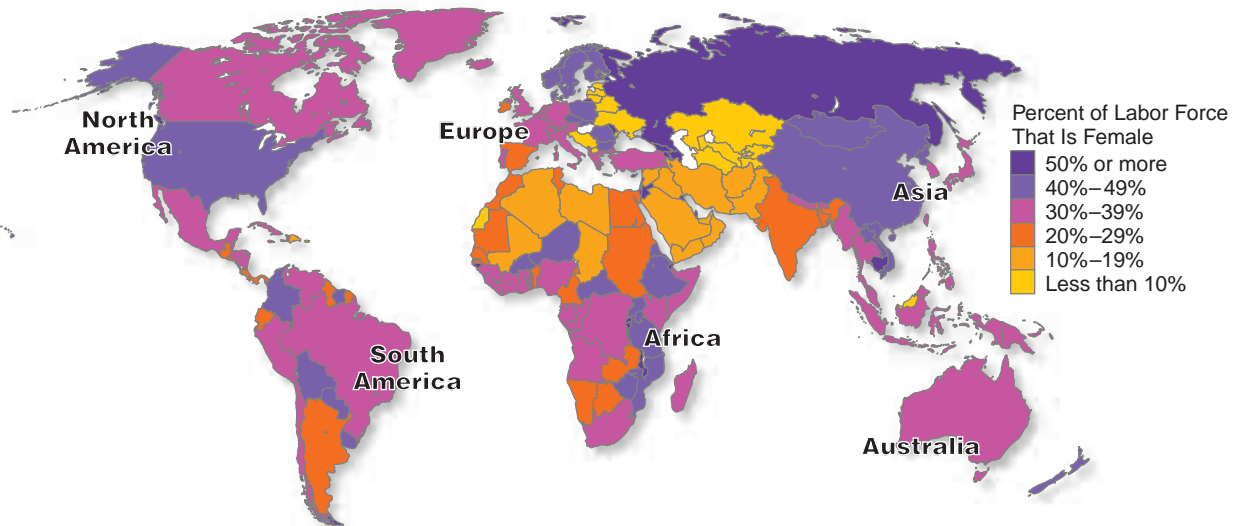
World View

Women in the Workplace

In most countries of the world, fewer women than men are employed in the labor force. In addition, the higher-paying jobs and better opportunities mostly still go to men. This map shows the percentage of women in various national labor forces.

North America

Europe

Asia

Africa

South America

Australia

Percent of Labor Force That Is Female

- 50% or more
- 40%−49%
- 30%−39%
- 20%−29%
- 10%−19%
- Less than 10%

Interpreting the Map

1. The countries with the highest percentage of women in the workplace include both highly developed countries such as the United States, Germany, and France and relatively undeveloped countries such as Mongolia, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. Can you think of some reasons for this?
2. Create a graph representing any other patterns you may find in this map.

Adapted from *The State of the World Atlas,* 5th ed.

and a half years old (Davies, 1990). Immediately after birth, friends and relatives give gifts "appropriate" to the child's sex, such as blue or pink blankets, baseball playsuits or frilly dresses, and trucks or dolls. (In fact, when boys do play with dolls, they are called *action figures* to distinguish the boys' toys from "girl" toys.) Studies of infant care have found that girls are cuddled more, talked to more, and handled more gently than are boys. Parents expect boys to be more assertive than girls are, and they discourage them from clinging.

Gender is also taught and reinforced in the assignment of family chores. In an investigation of almost seven hundred children between the ages of two and seventeen, Lynn White and David Brinkerhoff (1981) found that boys were often given "masculine" jobs, such as cutting grass and shoveling snow. Girls were more often assigned "feminine" chores, such as washing dishes and cleaning up the house.

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In what ways do schools reinforce gender socialization?   Although the most critical period of gender socialization occurs during early childhood, gender socialization occurs through the schools as well (Martin, 1998). Observation of preschool teachers reveals that many teachers encourage different behaviors from boys and girls. This pattern continues in the elementary school years.

Myra and David Sadker, in an extensive study of fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-grade students, found boys to be more assertive in class. Boys were eight times more likely than girls to call out answers, whereas girls sat patiently with their hands raised. The researchers linked this classroom behavior to the differential treatment given boys and girls by teachers. Teachers were more likely to accept the answers given by boys who called out answers. Girls who called out in class were given such messages as, "In this class we don't shout out answers; we raise our hands." According to Sadker and Sadker, the message is subtle and powerful: "Boys should be academically assertive and grab teacher attention; girls should act like ladies and keep quiet" (Sadker and Sadker, 1995).

Other areas in junior high school and high school where gender socialization is concentrated include clothing styles, school elections, social functions, and after-school activities.

In their book *Failing at Fairness,* the Sadkers examined sexism from elementary school through college. They concluded that, through differential treatment, America's schools often shortchange females. Academically, girls typically outperform boys in the early years of school. Through the transmission of gender role values, well-intentioned teachers often dampen female competitiveness. Girls, the study concludes, are subtly but systematically taught to be passive, to dislike math and science, and to defer to boys. Females tend to carry these attitudes into adult life and into the working world.

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Student Web Activity
Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at soc.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 10—Student Web Activities** for an activity on gender socialization in schools.

CLICK HERE

Figure 10.1 Focus on Theoretical Perspectives

Gender Inequality. Each of the major theoretical perspectives can focus on gender inequality in its own unique way. Explain why the examples given fit each theoretical perspective. How would each of the other theories approach the same social arrangement differently?

Theoretical Perspective	Social Arrangement	Example
Functionalism	Gender-based division of labor	Women are expected to perform household tasks for the benefit of society.
Conflict Theory	Patriarchy (male domination)	Women are denied high status occupations for the benefit of men.
Symbolic Interactionism	Favoring males over females in the classroom	Few females believe they can become scientists.

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These active girls do not fit the stereotypical image of male football player/female cheerleader.

How do peers contribute to gender socialization?   Adolescents want to be liked, so acceptance or rejection by peers greatly influences their self-concepts. Teens who most closely mirror traditional gender roles, such as male football players and female cheerleaders, are generally given the greatest respect, whereas "feminine" boys and "masculine" girls are assigned low status. This peer group pressure encourages teenagers to try to conform to idealized role models. To do otherwise is to risk rejection and a significant loss of self-esteem (Erikson, 1964, 1982; Adler and Adler, 1998).

> Women who seek to be equal to men lack ambition.
>
> **automobile bumper sticker**

Section 2 Assessment

1. Why do functionalists believe that gender differences have survived?
2. How do symbolic interactionists explain gender roles?
3. How do teachers and peers influence the development of gender concepts?

Critical Thinking

4. **Analyzing Information**   Of the major factors influencing gender identity, which do you think has had the most effect on your development? Explain.

Sociology *Today*

Gender-Based Hierarchy

In the not-too-distant past, most doctors were men, who worked closely on a daily basis with female nurses and receptionists who were clearly subordinate to them. This pattern has not disappeared despite the influx of women into the ranks of physicians. In many occupational settings today, most of the executives, supervisors, or higher-level professionals are men, assisted by female secretaries, clerks, aides, or lower-level managers. . . .

When women enter a workplace they frequently find a male hierarchy already established. Whether a woman's entry creates tensions for herself or others in the workplace presumably depends on the level of the job she takes and the source of any authority inherent in the job. She may come in at a subordinate level as a clerk or receptionist. But if she comes in at the same level as male co-workers, she will be faced with the unaccustomed process of jockeying for position among them, and competing with them for the attention and approval of the people higher up in the hierarchy. If she comes in as a manager or supervisor who has male subordinates, she must learn how to deal with people who may want her job, or who may find it difficult to adjust to being supervised by a woman. Some men believe so strongly in male superiority that they resist women's advancement up the workplace hierarchy. Such men sometimes say quite explicitly that it would be "an insult to their intelligence" to be supervised by a woman. . . . And there are fairly widespread male beliefs concerning the "natural" (male-dominant) relation between the sexes. In adulthood there is a strong stereotype associating power with masculinity . . . just as there was in childhood, so that women in supervisory positions generate ambivalent reactions in men: are they to treat this woman as a powerful person or a feminine person? If she is seen as feminine, then a man with traditional attitudes might feel it is appropriate to be protective and chivalrous, or at least courteous, while at the same time failing to take her seriously where work-related matters are concerned; clearly, he would expect to be the person who "takes charge" when they interact. Can he forget that a female supervisor is female, and adapt himself to a situation where she is the one who takes charge? It is much easier for men—and perhaps for many women too—to slip into a traditional male boss/female secretary or male doctor/female nurse kind of work relationship in which the "appropriate" power relationships between the sexes are maintained in the workplace hierarchy. Such traditional attitudes may be weakening, but they are still prevalent enough to impede the promotion of women in many situations.

Excerpted from Eleanor E. Maccoby, *The Two Sexes: Growing Up Apart, Coming Together.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 247–248.

Doing Sociology

Talk to several men and women with work experience. Ask them a few open-ended questions that you make up to test Maccoby's contention. In your verbal or written report, be specific about similarities or differences in male and female answers.

Gender Inequality

Key Terms

- sexism
- occupational sex segregation

Section Preview

Although great progress has been made, women today are still subject to prejudice and discrimination. This imbalance of power is seen most clearly in the areas of economics, law, and politics.

sexism
a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify sexual inequality

Women as a Minority Group

Most scientists consider biological determinism to be a moral threat because historically it has been used to rationalize the treatment of some people as inferior. This view, in short, has led to racism and *sexism*. **Sexism** is defined as a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify gender inequality. Just as minorities suffer from the effects of racism, women are hurt by sexism. Sexist ideology—the belief that men are naturally superior to women—has been used and is still being used to justify men's leadership and power positions in the economic, social, and political spheres of society.

Isn't sex discrimination disappearing?   The answer is yes and no. Some segments of American society now have more positive attitudes about women. And a few women now hold key positions traditionally reserved for men. In 1999, for example, Carleton Fiorina became the first female CEO (chief executive officer) of one of the thirty companies that make up the Dow Jones Industrial Average. In that same year, Eileen Collins became the first female NASA shuttle commander.
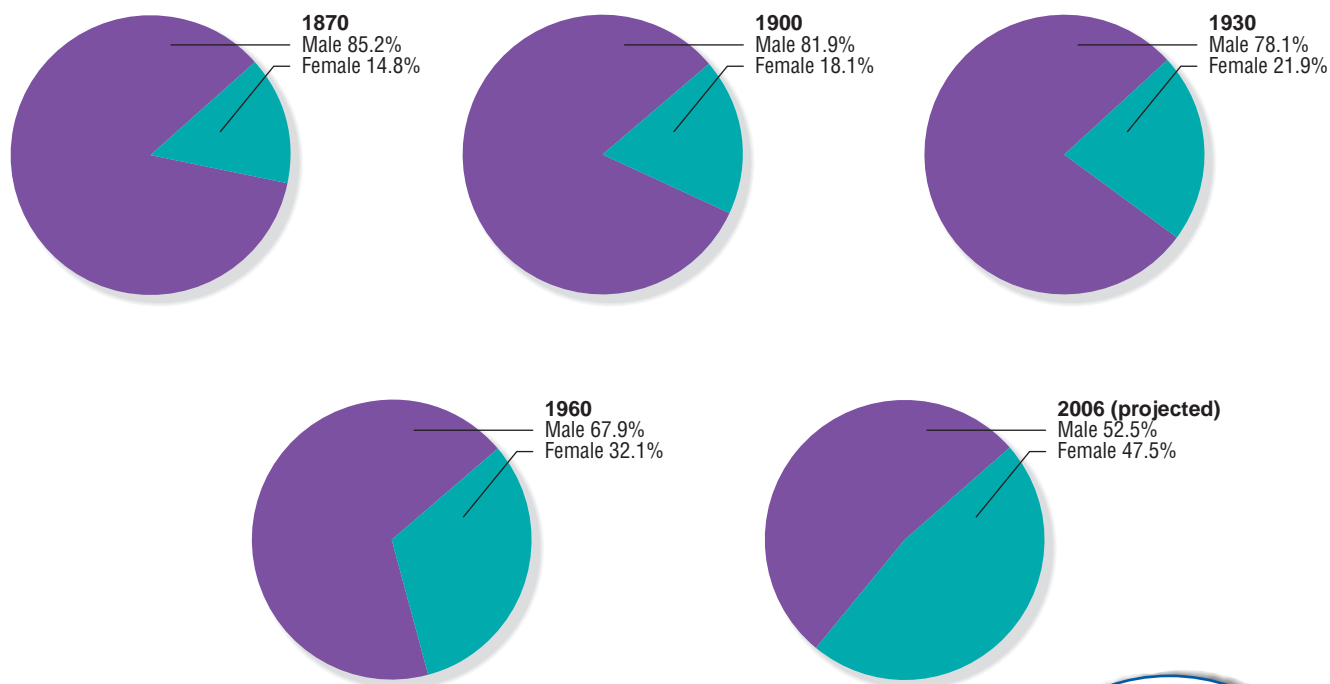
Still, a careful examination reveals many gaps in social rights, privileges, and rewards for women in the United States (Valian, 1998). These gaps, although they have closed somewhat in recent years, are reflected in the continuing inequality experienced by American women (Bianchi and Spain, 1996; Riley, 1997).

Occupational and Economic Inequality

By far the most important labor development in the United States over the last thirty years has been the dramatic increase in the number and proportion of women in the workforce. In 1999, 65 percent of women worked outside the home compared with 77 percent of men. That same year, women represented just under 50 percent of the U.S. labor force. (See Figure 10.2 on the next page.)
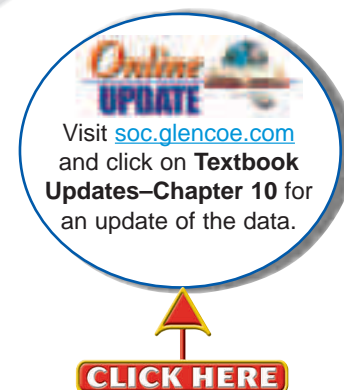
Hewlett-Packard president and CEO Carleton Fiorina has successfully battled sexism in her career.

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1870
Male 85.2%
Female 14.8%

1900
Male 81.9%
Female 18.1%

1930
Male 78.1%
Female 21.9%

1960
Male 67.9%
Female 32.1%

2006 (projected)
Male 52.5%
Female 47.5%

Figure 10.2 Composition of the U.S. Labor Force, by Sex: 1870–2006.
As this figure demonstrates, the male-female composition of the U.S. labor force has steadily moved toward parity. The female percentage of the labor force has moved from less than 15 percent in 1870 to just under 50 percent today. What do you think is the most important social consequence of this change?

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001.

Online UPDATE
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The greatest change in patterns of work involves married women with children under six years of age. The proportion of women in this group who work outside the home rocketed from 19 percent in 1960 to 37 percent in 1975 to 64.6 percent in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). (A discussion of working women's effects on the family appears in Chapter 11.)

What kinds of jobs are women doing?   Although women are participating in the labor force at increasing levels, they are concentrated in lower-status occupations. This is known as **occupational sex segregation.** Only 11 percent of engineer positions are held by women, and about 29 percent of attorney jobs. By contrast, women occupy nearly all of the "pink-collar" jobs—secretaries, clerks, stenographers—whose purpose is to support those higher up the occupational ladder (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000d). Moreover, when women are in high-status occupational groups, they are concentrated in lower-prestige, lower-paid jobs. Female lawyers in firms seldom occupy the higher-level administrative positions. Even within female-dominated occupations, such as public school administration, a disproportionate share of higher positions are filled by men.

Do women earn less than men?   As you read in the Using Your Sociological Imagination feature at the beginning of the chapter, there is a

occupational sex segregation
the concentration of women in lower-status positions

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These Japanese women are almost certainly not earning as much as men in equivalent positions.

wide discrepancy between the earnings of American women and men. In 1999, women who worked full-time earned only seventy-two cents for every dollar earned by men. To put it another way, women now work about seven days to earn as much as men earn in five days. The good news is that this salary gap has decreased since 1980, when women were earning 60 percent as much as men. (See Figure 10.3 below.)

Are all occupations affected? In virtually every occupational category, men's earning power outstrips that of women. The earnings gap persists, regardless of educational attainment. Women in the same professional occupations as men earn less than their male counterparts, as illustrated in Figure 10.4 on the opposite page. This is true even for women who have pursued careers on a full-time basis for all of their adult lives. Furthermore, males in female-dominated occupations typically earn more than women.

How do American women fare globally? As noted in the Using Your Sociological Imagination feature opening this chapter, women in the United States do not fare very well economically compared with women in other developed countries. Here, of course, we are talking about relative earning power, or what women earn compared to men—not absolute dollar amounts. Although women in the United States are not at the bottom of the equality list, they are closer to the bottom than the top. In dramatic contrast is Australia, where women earn more than men! (See Figure 10.5.)


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UPDATE
Visit soc.glencoe.com and click on **Textbook Updates–Chapter 10** for an update of the data.
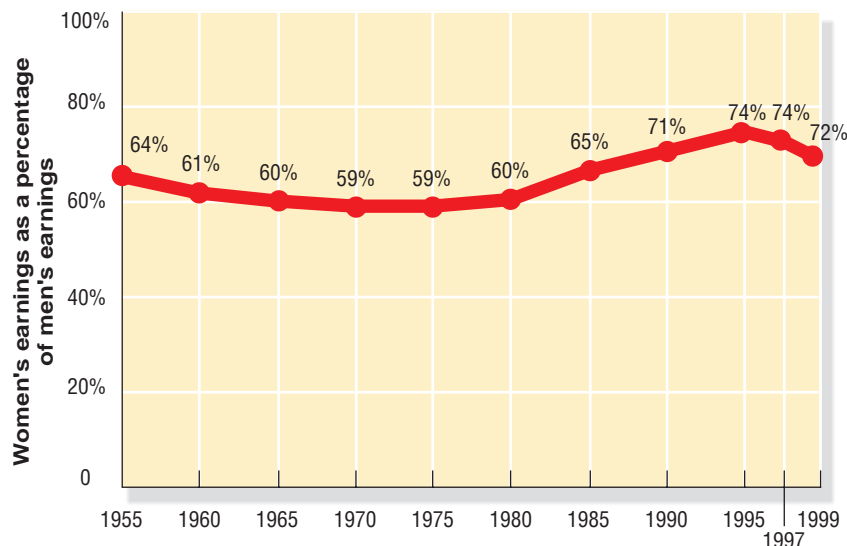
Figure 10.3 What Women Earn Compared to Men. *This figure traces the ratio of women's to men's earnings since 1955. Discuss two important conclusions you can make from these data. Use material in the text to help.*

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001.

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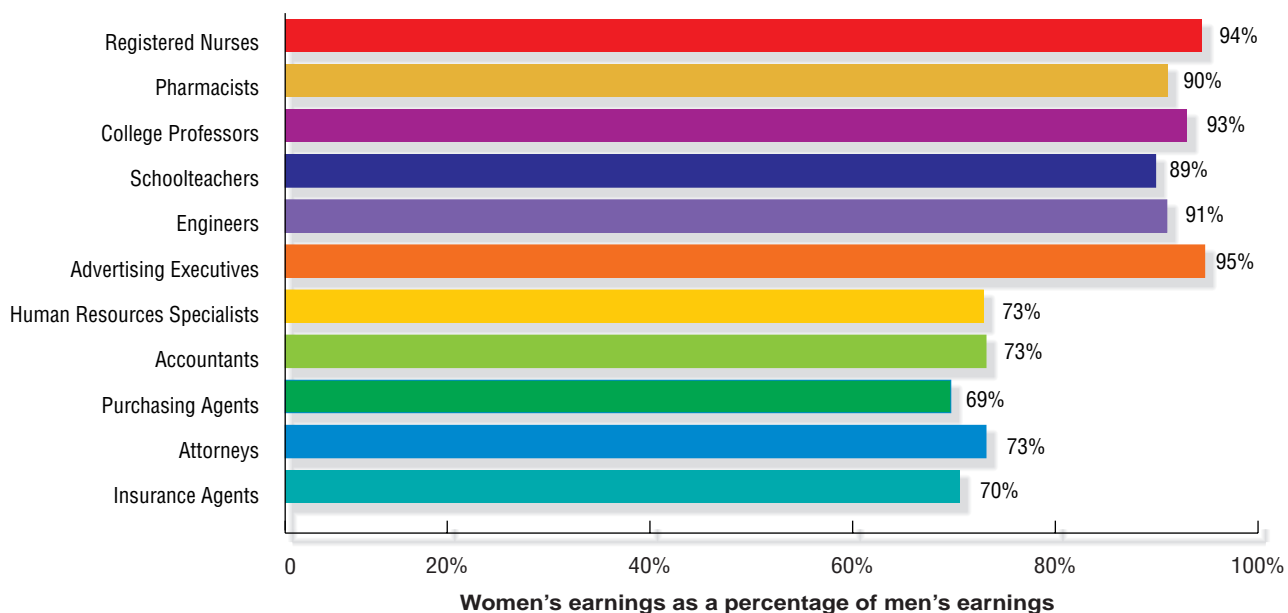
Figure 10.4 Female-to-Male Earnings: 2000. *On average, women in the U.S. earn about 72 cents for every dollar a man earns. In what way do the data in this figure support the contention that gender inequality is real?*

Source: "The 21st Annual Salary Survey," *Working Woman* (August, 2000).

Legal and Political Inequality

Supporters of women's rights point to laws that show a bias against women. National, state, and local legal codes, they claim, reflect a sexual bias that results in important differences between the levels of political power of women and men.

What are some biases in law?

An example that women's groups point to is the U.S. Supreme Court decision that refused to grant women the legal guarantee of health insurance benefits for pregnancy-related medical costs. This was despite the fact that medical coverage for conditions unique to men—such as prostate problems and vasectomies—was routinely provided.

Some states have traditionally refused women the right to keep their own surnames after marriage. Other states have had *protective legislation* restricting women's rights. Such protective legislation limited the number of hours women could work. It also limited the conditions under which they could work, with actions such as barring women from toxic areas because of potential birth defects in their children. It even limited the kinds of work they could do by regulating such matters as the amount of weight a woman could be permitted to lift (thirty pounds). Supporters of these laws viewed them as
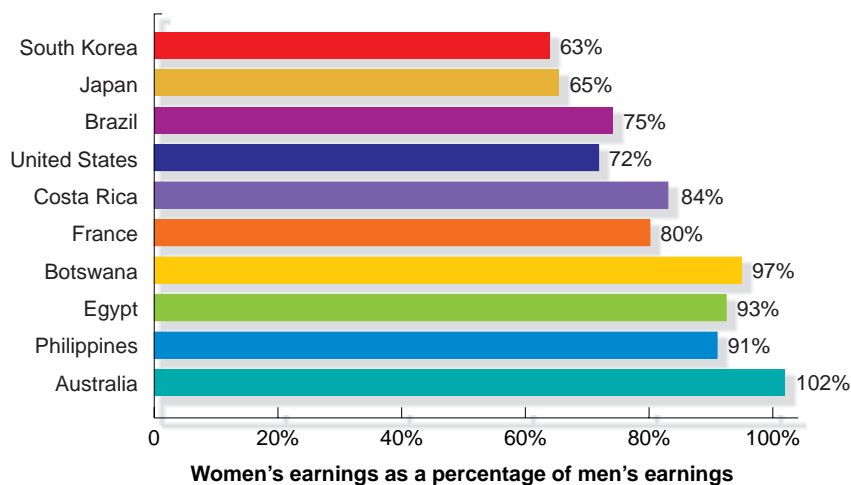
Figure 10.5 Women's Wages Compared with Men's Wages in Selected Countries. *This figure compares what men and women earn in various foreign countries. The data only considers the wages of nonagricultural workers. What does the score of 102 percent for Australia mean?*

Source: International Labour Organization, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, 2000.

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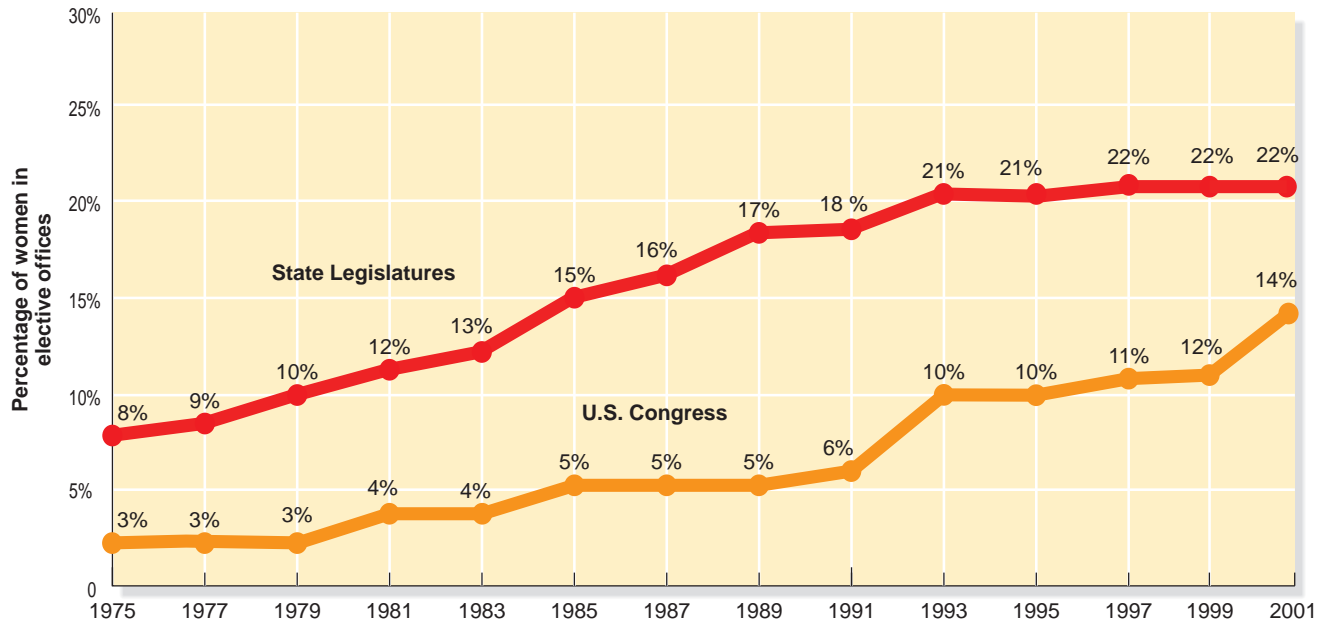
Figure 10.6 Percentages of Women in Elective Offices. *This graph shows the degree of female success in elective politics from 1975 to today. Explain why the figures are still so low.*

Source: Center for the American Woman and Politics, National Information Bank on Women in Public Office, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University.

safeguards against abuse and exploitation of women. However, the end result was that women were denied certain jobs, many of which are better paid than more traditional occupations for women.

Passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 nullified such laws, but their practice still lingers. Moreover, the Family and Medical Leave Act (1993), which requires that employees be given up to twelve weeks without pay for childbirth, adoption, personal illness, or caring for a family member with a serious illness, still negatively affects women. Because women are more likely to take maternity leave than men are to take paternity leave, this legislation gives employers another reason to give hiring preference to men.

There are differences by gender in criminal law as well. Certain crimes are typically associated with one gender or the other. For example, laws against prostitution are generally enforced against only the female prostitutes, while their male customers go free.

How do American women stand politically?   Women appear to be participating in elective politics at an increasing rate. (See Figure 10.6 above.) Recently, the numbers of female governors, lieutenant governors, attorneys general, and mayors have been growing. Some increases have occurred at the national level as well. In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro became the first female vice-presidential candidate in the history of the United States; Madeleine Albright was named the first female secretary of state in 1996; Elizabeth Dole campaigned for her party's nomination for president before the election of 2000.

Still, although women constitute more than half the population, they hold a relatively small proportion of important political positions. (See Figure 10.7.)

> This woman's place is in the House—the House of Representatives.
>
> **Bella Abzug**
> **U.S. representative**

CONTENTS

Figure 10.7 Women in National, State, and Local Political Positions, 2002

This table contains the number and percentage of women today in selected political positions. Describe the types of political offices in which women have been the most successful.

Position	Number of Women	Percentage Female
Federal legislative branch		
U.S. representative	60	14%
U.S. senator	13	13
House leadership post	6	1
Senate leadership post	5	5
Federal judicial branch		
Supreme Court justice	2	22
U.S. Court of Appeals, chief judge	1	8
U.S. District Court judge	7	8
Federal executive branch		
Cabinet member	3	21
Executive agency head	2	22
Principal advisor, office of the president	4	36
State executive branch		
Governor	5	10
Lt. governor	17	34
Attorney general	8	16
Secretary of state	13	26
State treasurer	12	24
State legislative branch		
State representative	1,668	23
State senator	403	20
Local executive branch		
Mayors of 100 largest cities	12	12
Mayors of cities over 30,000	202	21
All mayors and municipal council members in cities over 10,000	4,513	21

Source: Center for the American Woman and Politics, Rutgers University, "Fact Sheet," 2002.
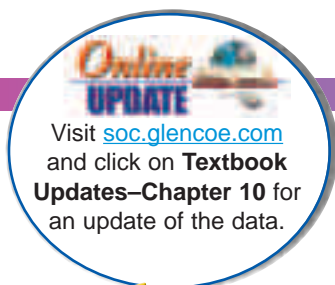
Women are more likely than men to take extended leaves of absence for such things as maternity leave. How does this affect their lifetime earnings?

"

If women want any rights more than they's got, why don't they just take them, and not be talking about it.

**Sojourner Truth
American abolitionist**

"

Women occupied only 13.8 percent of the seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2001. And although the number of female U.S. senators increased from two to thirteen over the 1990s, women still represented just 13 percent of the Senate in 2001 (Center for the American Woman and Politics, 2001). Women in Congress have seldom risen to positions of power. Only ten females chair House or Senate standing committees.

The record for women in appointed offices is also poor. Although there have been recent increases in the number of appointments, the total is extremely small. When President Jimmy Carter appointed two women to his cabinet in 1977, it was the first time two women had sat on the Cabinet at one time. President Bill Clinton, almost twenty years later, appointed three women to Cabinet posts. Still, the total number of women who have ever served as Cabinet officers is very small. President Ronald Reagan appointed the first woman Supreme Court justice, Sandra Day O'Connor, in 1981; and President Clinton elevated Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the high court in 1993. Only a small percentage of federal judges are women.

The number of women holding public office in the United States is among the lowest in the Western world. With some notable exceptions, Western European nations have much greater female political participation. In the Scandinavian countries, for example, up to 20 percent of members of parliament are women.

Sociologists Richard Zwiegenhaft and William Domhoff (1998) do point out that women are now part of the power elite. The power elite is no longer the exclusively male group it used to be. Still, women are seriously underrepresented, and most of those women who do join the power elite come from upper-class backgrounds.

Section 3 Assessment

1. Define *sexism.*
2. Give several examples of legal bias against women.

Critical Thinking

3. **Evaluating Information**   Do you support or oppose affirmative action programs for women in the workplace? Give reasons for your answer.

Tech Trends

Men, Women, and the Internet

Although women are still subject to discrimination in some technical careers, such as computer programming and information systems analysis, they are finding more and better opportunities in Internet business fields than in any other area of business. Women have founded and become chief executive officer (CEO) of many high-tech companies, including Marimba, Oxygen Media, iVillage, and Women.com. Kim Polese, CEO of Marimba, was featured on more business magazine covers in 1998 than Bill Gates, founder and CEO of Microsoft.

These unanticipated opportunities for women are due to several factors. First, whereas most American industries developed when women were expected to stay at home, the system that would become the Internet was started only about thirty years ago. The Internet itself did not become really popular until the mid-1990s. By that time, women had already entered the workforce in large numbers and had begun to occupy mid- and upper-level management positions.

Second, women are able to profit from the tremendous demand for experienced marketing managers created by the Internet. Because women are responsible for some 85 percent of purchasing decisions in non-Internet businesses, they have the experience to move into marketing management positions. Internet companies have turned to these women to fill important positions.

Third, the Internet has created an astronomical demand for skilled high-tech workers. American high-tech firms are desperate for workers, and they are turning to women as an underutilized resource.

Of course, not all women entering Internet businesses escape sexism. This trend, nonetheless, is a step toward greater workplace equality. Because the Internet has rapidly become such a large part of the U.S. economy, and because it will only continue to grow, the information age holds considerable promise for gender equality.

The Internet is helping to open up greater gender equality in the workplace.

Analyzing the Trends

Choose one of the three major theoretical perspectives, and analyze the rise of women in Internet businesses. Use information from this chapter to support your analysis. Predict whether or not the rise of women in Internet businesses will lead to improved gender equality in other workplace arenas.

Ageism

Key Terms

- age stratification
- ageism

Section Preview

The relatively low social standing of older people is based on ageism. Each of the theoretical perspectives has a unique slant on ageism. Stereotypes are often used to justify prejudice and discrimination, which can harm the self-concepts of older people.

age stratification
the unequal distribution of scarce resources based on age

ageism
a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify age-based prejudice and discrimination

Defining Ageism

Chronological age is another basis for social ranking. For this reason, sociologists are interested in **age stratification**—when the unequal distribution of scarce resources (power, wealth, prestige) in a society is based on age. Like inequality based on race, ethnicity, or gender, age stratification must be socially justified. The rationale for aged-based inequality comes in the form of **ageism**—a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify prejudice and discrimination against a particular age group. Although age can be an advantage or disadvantage for any group, sociologists are especially interested in inequality among older people. As the median age of the U.S. population grows older, this form of ageism affects more and more people.

Functionalism and Ageism

According to functionalists, elderly people in a given society are treated according to the role the aged play in that society. In many societies, ageism is not an issue. In fact, elderly people in many cultures are treated with great respect and honor. (See the Focus on Research on page 334.)

In agricultural societies, elderly males usually play important roles, such as the role of priest or elder. Donald Cowgill and Lowell Holmes give examples of societies in which the elderly are highly valued.

In all of the African societies, growing old is equated with rising status and increased respect. Among the Igbo, the older person is assumed to be wise: this not only brings him respect, since he is consulted for his wisdom, it also provides him with a valued role in his society. The Bantu elder is "the Father of His People" and revered as such. In Samoa, too, old age is "the best time of life" and older persons are accorded great respect. Likewise, in Thailand, older persons are honored and deferred to and Adams reports respect and affection for older people in rural Mexico (Cowgill and Holmes, 1972).
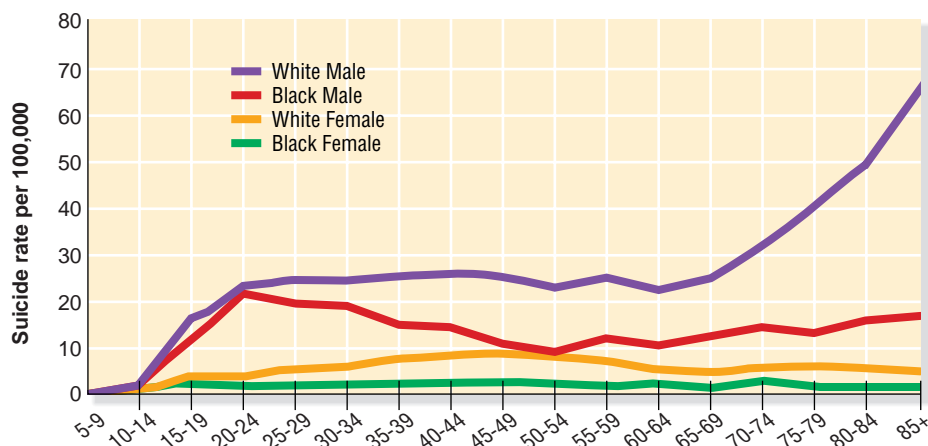
Figure 10.8 U.S. Suicide Rates by Age, Gender, and Racial Group, 1997. *This figure charts U.S. suicide rates by age, gender, and racial category. Why do you think suicide rates climb for males at about age 65? Use material from the textbook in your answer.*

Source: National Institute of Mental Health, September, 1999.

Visit soc.glencoe.com and click on **Textbook Updates–Chapter 10** for an update of the data.

CLICK HERE

In early colonial America, no stigma was attached to age. In fact, to be elderly brought respect along with the opportunity to fill the most prestigious positions in the community. It was believed that God looked with favor on those who reached old age. The longer one lived, the more likely he or she was to have been chosen to go to heaven. The Bible linked age with living a moral life: "Keep my commandments, for length of days and long life and peace shall they add unto thee." During the 1600s and 1700s, Americans even tried to appear older than they actually were. Some people wore clothing that made them appear older and covered their hair with powdered wigs. During the 1700s, people often inflated their age when reporting to census takers.
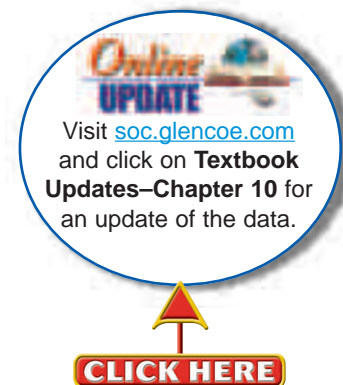
Attitudes about aging changed greatly as industrialization changed the nature of work. In a technical society, an adult's value lessens when he or she no longer contributes fully to the common good. Thus, aging tends to lead to lower status. Because modern societies change rapidly, younger workers are more likely to possess the current skills needed in the workplace. As individuals get older, their skills are more likely to be out of date in the workplace. Thus, they lack the "wisdom" that is most highly valued.

This loss of status with older age might help explain the increase in the suicide rate for men beginning at about retirement age. (See Figure 10.8.) Men may have greater difficulty in older age than women because they have been socialized in a culture that encourages men to identify strongly with work while they are younger, but denies them a sense of value after retirement.

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When a man retires and time is no longer a matter of urgent importance, his colleagues generally present him with a watch.

**R. C. Sherriff
American humorist**

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Conflict Theory and Ageism

Competition over scarce resources lies at the heart of ageism for the conflict perspective. Elderly people compete with other age groups for economic resources, power, and prestige. In preindustrial societies, older people often get a fair share of the scarce resources. This is because work in preindustrial society is labor intensive, and all available hands must be utilized. Also, the elderly are sources of valuable knowledge about practices and history.

Industrial society, in contrast, usually has more workers than it needs. In addition, industrial societies save scarce resources by replacing high-priced older workers with less costly younger ones. Forced retirement is one way the more powerful age groups remove elderly competitors.

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According to conflict theory, prejudice and discrimination are used by the dominant group as weapons in the control of minority groups. If older people can be stereotyped as intellectually dull, closed-minded, inflexible, and unproductive, forcing their retirement from the labor market becomes relatively easy. This leaves more jobs available for younger workers.

Symbolic Interactionism and Ageism

Many elderly people are realizing that learning computer skills will help them keep in touch with friends, keep updated on financial and health issues, and allow them to find part-time work, if desired.

Like racism, ageism involves creating negative stereotypes. According to symbolic interactionists, children learn negative images of older people just as they learn other aspects of culture. Through the process of socialization, stereotypes of elderly people are often firmly implanted into a child's view of the world. Negative images of older people have been observed in children as young as three years old (Hillier and Barrow, 1999).

What are some stereotypes of the elderly?   By definition, stereotypes are inaccurate, because they do not apply to all members of a group. Stereotypes of older people are no exception, as much research has shown. Most elderly people are not senile, forgetful, or "daft." Old age is not a sexless period for the majority of those over sixty-five. There are few age differences on job-related factors. Most elderly people are able to learn new things and adapt to change (Atchley, 1999).

In summary, there is enough evidence to challenge the truth of popular stereotypes of elderly people. Of course, some older people do fit one or more of these stereotypes (as some young people fit societal stereotypes), and many individuals are likely to fit one or more of them as they reach age seventy. This fact, however, does not justify applying the stereotypes to all older people at any age or for mindlessly applying them to individuals in their fifties and sixties.

Section 4 Assessment

1. How are sexism and ageism "two sides of the same coin"?
2. Below are several statements about older people. Identify each statement with one major theoretical perspective: functionalism (F), conflict theory (C), or symbolic interactionism (S).
   a. Ageism results in part from an oversupply of labor.
   b. Young people are uncomfortable around older people.
   c. The stigma attached to aging promotes a low self-concept among older people.
   d. Ageism is associated with industrialization.
   e. Older people are stereotyped.
   f. Ageism exists in part because older workers are inefficient.

Critical Thinking

3. **Evaluating Information** Do you think ageism is a problem in American society? Support your case with information.

Inequality In America's Elderly Population

Key Term

- interest group

Elderly People as a Minority Group

Because early research tended to study older people in institutions, studies focused on people with diminished mental and physical capacities. This perspective coincided with the American public's negative view of elderly people. Sociologists believe that the best way to expose this blaming of older people for their situation is to view them as a minority (Hillier and Barrow, 1999).

Racial, ethnic, and religious groups have long been considered as minorities. As you have seen, women have recently been recognized as a minority group. Not until recently have researchers viewed older people as a distinct segment of society subject to the same discrimination and stereotyping as other minority groups.

Economics of the Elderly

The economic situation among America's older people has improved since 1960, but as a group older Americans are far from being well off. Several factors make it hard to determine exactly how elderly people compare economically with other groups, however. For one thing, the way poverty among older people is measured distorts the real picture.

Why is poverty measured differently for older people?
Despite the fact that elderly people spend proportionately more on health care and housing than younger people, the federal government assumes that older people require less money to live. If the standard used for younger age categories were applied to elderly people, their poverty rate would increase from 9.7 percent to 15 percent. Poverty rates also fail to take into account the older people who are officially considered to be "near poor." These people make up just over 6 percent of the elderly population. Counting these at-risk elderly people, about 16 percent of those over age sixty-five is poor (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000b).

Nor do official statistics include the "hidden poor" among the elderly population. These older people live either in institutions or with relatives because they cannot afford to live independently. Inclusion of these people would substantially raise the poverty rate for elderly Americans.

Unfortunately, life is not this comfortable for a large segment of America's elderly population.

Section Preview

The poverty rate for America's elderly population stands at 9.7 percent. Members of racial and ethnic minorities are in the poorest ranks. The political process offers the major source of power for elderly Americans. Older people exert political influence through their high voting rate and their support of special interest groups.

Focus on Research

Case Study: A Town without Pity

In the mountains of Western Ireland lies the old agricultural town of Ballybran. Power in this town traditionally lay in the hands of the "old ones," particularly the senior males. Here, sociologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes spent a year doing fieldwork, studying the effects of modernization on the society. She identifies the basic demographic shift that has led to the death of the rural Irish gerontocracy [rule by elders], describes the negative consequences of this change for the elderly, and discusses several areas in which the loss of social standing among the elderly is reflected.

Scheper-Hughes found that with modernization and with dependence on imported food came a lessening of respect for the skills and knowledge of the old farmers.

Underlying this picture, of course, is the devaluating of the agricultural way of life among these people. At an earlier time, the patriarchal father delayed retirement and sparked intense competition among his sons for rights to the family lands. Now heir selection is determined more by the process of elimination than the choice of the father—"the last one to escape (usually the youngest son) gets stuck by default with an unproductive farm and saddled with a life of celibacy and greatly resented service to the 'old people' " (Scheper-Hughes, 1983:134).

The result of all this for the aged parents is fairly clear: They no longer have the economic power base they once used to control the younger generation and to maintain their superior status in the family and community. Because young people prefer to be "liberated" from the land, the "old ones" control little that the youth want. The awe and respect for the elderly that once characterized the community has, in many cases, been replaced by not only pity but also contempt. The demise of the traditional family farming–based culture leaves the elderly father, in Scheper-Hughes's words, a "broken figure." Toleration from his adult children is the most he can expect, open ridicule the worst. With the erosion of their economic power, the elderly have also lost their cherished role as preservers of the ancient Celtic traditions—the myths, stories, songs, prayers, and proverbs. In fact, the young tend to reject these traditions. Worse, the majority of high school students resent having to study the Irish language, a "dead" language that they believe will be of no use to them in the commercial and professional world outside the rural community.

Ageism has had many negative effects on these older people. Without a meaningful work identity, the once-proud leaders have no sense of place in the community. Alcoholism, diminished self-esteem, and depression are widely seen among those over age fifty. Many are single, widows or widowers, without family or friends to take care of them. Scheper-Hughes writes, "The Irish village of the west coast today embodies a broken culture; a state of affairs most detrimental to the aged who are unable to flee or accept new values, and who, consequently, are left to contemplate the wreckage" (Scheper-Hughes, 1983:145).

As "progress" comes to both city and country, many of the local elderly population find their skills are not needed and that they have no role to play in the life of the community.

Working with the Research

1. Which research methods are best suited to a study like this? Explain.

2. Which theoretical perspective do you think contributes most to how we can understand what happened in this village?

Figure 10.9 Poverty Rates Among Americans Aged 65 and Over: 1960–1999.

This figure documents the changing poverty rate among Americans aged 65 and over since 1960. Explain why it would be misleading to cite the current poverty rate as evidence that America's aged population is economically well off.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1966–2000.
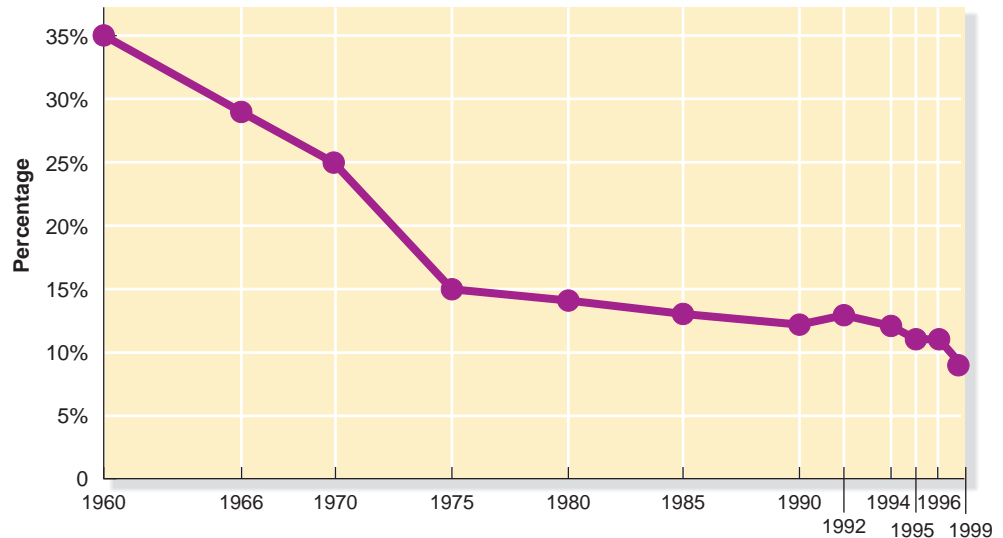
The income gap among elderly people also distorts the economic picture. Some older people have moderate to high incomes based on dividends from assets, cash savings, and private retirement programs. Most elderly Americans, however, do not have sources of income beyond Social Security benefits. The existence of a small percentage of high-income older people gives the false impression that most older people are economically well off. Figure 10.9 shows the poverty rate for elderly people since 1960.

What other factors affect elderly Americans?   Older people who are members of racial or ethnic minority groups are generally in worse condition than older white Americans. The poverty rate among older African Americans is three times that for whites. For older Latinos, the poverty rate is more than two and one-half times that of non-Latino white Americans. Problems that racial and ethnic minorities face because of discrimination become magnified in old age.

Elderly women constitute one of the poorest segments of American society. Women over age sixty-five are twice as likely to live in poverty than their male counterparts (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996b). Elderly women most likely to be poor are single women who either have never married or are divorced, separated, or widowed. This is not surprising, because the roots of poverty among older women lie in their work-related experiences. Because older women were discouraged or blocked from better jobs throughout their work lives, they are unable to support themselves in their later years (Sidel, 1996).

This elderly man is part of America's "hidden poor." What does that mean?

Overall, what is the economic position of older people in the United States?   In summary, then, elderly people are economically better off than they were four decades ago. Despite this improvement, large segments of Americans over sixty-five years of age live either in poverty or near poverty. This is especially true for elderly members of racial and ethnic minorities and for elderly women.

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Snapshot of America
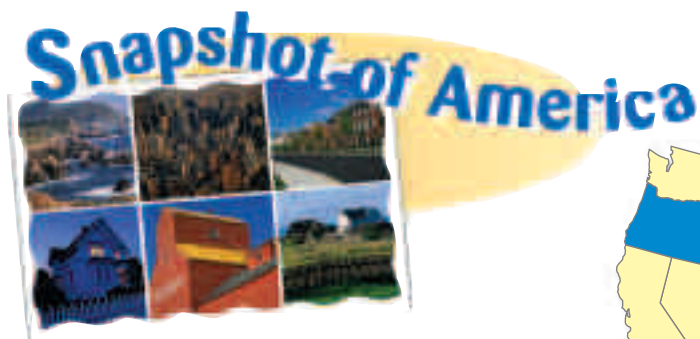
Percentage of Population Aged Sixty-five and Over

The *graying of America* refers to the growing elderly population. Improved medical care, better nutrition, and healthier lifestyles have all contributed to longer life expectancies in the United States. This map shows the percentage of the population that is aged sixty-five years old and over in each state.
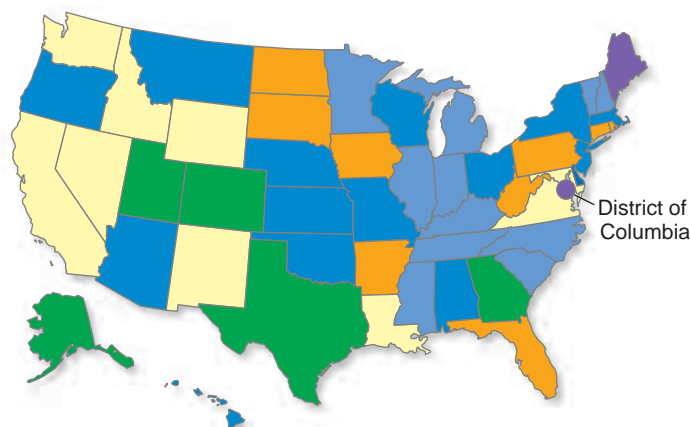
District of Columbia

Source: *The World Almanac of the U.S.A.,* Allan Carpenter and Carl Provorse, Mahwah, NJ: World Almanac Books, 2001.

Percentage of the Population Aged Sixty-five and Over

- More than 14%
- 13%
- 12%
- 11%
- Less than 11%

Interpreting the Map

1. Describe the distribution pattern of elderly people across the United States. Create a chart representing the distribution pattern.
2. Where is your state in this distribution?
3. Research the voting rate for elderly people in your state. Is it higher or lower than the national average?

Source: *The World Almanac of the U.S.A.*, 2001.

Political Power and the Elderly

Given the limited economic resources of older people, it is clear that any power they hold is gained through the political process. Especially important are the voting booth and political interest groups.

What is the voting turnout among elderly Americans? Voting turnout in the United States increases with age. Since the mid-1980s, Americans aged sixty-five and over have been the most active voters in presidential and congressional elections. In 1996, for example, 67 percent of this group voted in the presidential election, compared with just over 30 percent of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds and just over 49 percent of twenty-five- to forty-four-year-olds (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997a).

Figure 10.10 Selected Socioeconomic Characteristics of Elderly Americans. *From this figure, some comparative statements can be made about the economic situation of elderly Americans. What are two important statements that can be supported by these data?*

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

	Whites	African Americans	Latinos	Women	Men
Median Income	$14,374	$9,766	$8,780	$10,943	$19,079
Percent in Poverty	8.3%	22.7%	20.4%	11.8%	6.9%

Does voting lead to political power? Most analysts believe that the potential political power of elderly Americans as a group is not fully realized because of the diversity of the older population. Because older people cut across many important divisions in American society—social class, ethnicity, race, geographic area, religion—they do not speak with a unified political voice. In fact, they do not vote as a bloc on any political question, even on issues related directly to their interests. This lack of unity weakens their political clout. As the population of the United States ages, however, and the number of elderly voters increases, it is possible that "gray power" may become a significant political force.

interest group
a group organized to influence political decision making

What is the role of interest groups? **Interest groups** are organized to influence political decision making. Millions of Americans belong to interest groups that target ageism, such as the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) and the Gray Panthers. These groups have been effective in protecting programs that benefit older Americans, such as Medicare and Social Security.

Section 5 Assessment

1. Of the following, which is an accurate statement?
   a. Since 1960, the economic situation for elderly people in the United States has deteriorated.
   b. The poverty rate for Americans over age sixty-five is lower than the official count indicates.
   c. Problems of older Americans who are members of racial or ethnic minorities are generally more severe than problems of elderly whites.
   d. Older Americans are politically vulnerable.
2. What can older Americans do to increase their impact on government policy and legislation?

Critical Thinking

3. **Drawing Conclusions** Create mini-profiles of five elderly people you know. Identify them by racial, ethnic, gender, and occupational group. Interview each of them briefly about their main concerns regarding aging in America. What conclusions can you draw from these interviews?

> "
> The older I get, the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom.
> "
> **H. L. Mencken**
> **American critic**

Summary

Section 1: Sex and Gender Identity

Main Idea: All societies expect people to behave in certain ways based on their sex. Through socialization, members of a society acquire an awareness of themselves as masculine or feminine.

Section 2: Theoretical Perspectives on Gender

Main Idea: The functionalist perspective focuses on the origins of gender differences. Conflict theory looks at the reasons gender differences continue to exist. Symbolic interactionism attempts to explain the ways in which gender is acquired.

Section 3: Gender Inequality

Main Idea: Although great progress has been made, women today are still subject to prejudice and discrimination. This imbalance of power is seen most clearly in the areas of economics, law, and politics.

Section 4: Ageism

Main Idea: The relatively low social standing of older people is based on ageism. Each of the theoretical perspectives has a unique slant on ageism.

Section 5: Inequality In America's Elderly Population

Main Idea: The poverty rate for America's elderly population stands at around 10 percent. Members of racial and ethnic minorities are in the poorest ranks. The political process offers the major source of power for elderly Americans. Older people exert political influence through their high voting rate and their support of special interest groups.

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Reviewing Vocabulary

Complete each sentence using each term once.

a. gender identity
b. sex
c. gender socialization
d. sexism
e. occupational sex segregation
f. ageism
g. biological determinism
h. age stratification
i. interest group

1. An organization that attempts to influence political decision making is called _____.
2. _____ is the unequal distribution of scarce resources based on age.
3. The classification of people as male or female based on biological characteristics is called _____.
4. _____ is the concentration of one gender in certain occupations.
5. _____ is a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify sexual inequality.
6. The belief that behavioral differences are due to inherited physical characteristics is called _____.
7. _____ is a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify age-based prejudice and discrimination.
8. _____ is an awareness of being masculine or feminine.
9. The social process of learning how to act as a boy or girl is called _____.

Reviewing the Facts

1. According to the functionalist perspective, what was the main result of the division of labor?
2. Which sociological perspective emphasizes the effects of parents, teachers, and peers on gender socialization?

3. How would you explain the increase in women's participation in the labor force?

4. Give one reason why the gap between men's and women's salaries persists.

5. What segment of the poor population is often not included in the statistics on elderly poor people?

6. According to the text, what is the best way that the elderly can effect social change on their own behalf?

Thinking Critically

1. **Analyzing Information** A common phrase in sociology is "you inherit your sex and learn your gender." What do you think this phrase means?

2. **Applying Concepts** Physical strength is not as important for males today as it was in past times. The nature of work has changed so that not as many jobs require stamina or physical strength. What impact do you think this devaluing of muscle strength has on society? List five attitudes or values that could be affected.

3. **Evaluating Information** Certain jobs, such as firefighting, still require great physical strength and stamina. Often, these positions have minimum requirements to ensure that employees can fulfill all the necessary duties. Because of biology, men generally find it easier to meet many of these physical requirements. Some cities have responded by lowering the standards for women to ensure that women are represented in these vocations. Other cities have refused and have been subjected to discrimination lawsuits. What are some arguments for and against the policy of lowering standards to ensure representation of women in certain jobs? Are there situations in which you would allow different standards? Are there situations in which you would not? Discuss your views.

4. **Making Inferences** Some schools have experimented with girls-only classes. Research seems to suggest that this situation helps to increase self-esteem in young girls. Do you think your schoolwork would improve if you attended a girls-only or boys-only school? Do you think there are differences in the way that girls and boys learn?

5. **Drawing Conclusions** U.S. society has definite expectations about female and male roles. What are the gender norms concerning personal appearance? Do these norms work against women? Do they work against males?

6. **Categorizing Information** Elderly people remain a forgotten population in our society. We place them in nursing homes, or we complain that they drive too slowly. How might our society take advantage of the natural skills, knowledge, and wisdom of older people? Suggest three ways in which your community could benefit from programs and activities aimed at utilizing these strengths. Use the diagram below to summarize your suggestions.

STRENGTHS OF THE ELDERLY	PROGRAM/ACTIVITY THAT UTILIZES STRENGTH

7. **Making Inferences** The text discusses some of the stereotypes associated with older people. Using recent research on these stereotypes, do you think the norms underlying ageism will diminish? Check your thoughts against the opinions of a few elderly people.

Sociology Projects

1. **Advertising and the Image of Women** Search old magazines and newspapers to create a scrapbook of how marketers can use gender negatively (to encourage stereotypes, for example) or positively (to create new images).

Gather several magazines with lots of advertising that you have permission to cut up. (Waiting rooms in doctors' and dentists' offices and car repair shops are good sources—just be sure to ask permission!) Carefully cut out twenty ads that feature women. Paste each ad to a sheet of paper. Then label each ad accord-

ing to one of the negative or positive criteria listed below. Feel free to make up your own categories if needed.

a. reinforces a female stereotype
b. uses sex appeal to sell a product
c. encourages a women to be beautiful
d. idealizes youthful appearance
e. reinforces gender roles of children
f. generally offensive, degrading, or insulting
g. shows a woman in a leadership role
h. shows a woman in a nontraditional role
i. shows a minority woman in a professional capacity

When you have completed your "scrapbook," analyze the ads for negative and positive uses of gender marketing. Write a brief paragraph summarizing your findings.

2. **Gender** This activity is a thought problem and requires a great deal of imagination. What would your day be like if you awoke one morning and suddenly found that you had changed gender? As you go about your day, think of everything that would be different if you were a member of the opposite sex. Write down several things that stand out as you go through the day. For example, if you are on a sports team, would you likely be on that team if you changed gender? Would you be playing a different sport?

3. **Lifestyles for the Elderly** Create a poster or other visual aid that depicts how life has changed for elderly people during the twentieth century. You may want to talk to grandparents or others about what life was like for older people in the past. How do you think longevity and health factors have changed lifestyle for older people?

4. **Create a Skit** Instead of a visual aid as suggested in the previous activity, interview an elderly person and create a skit based upon his or her remarks. Some of the questions you may want to ask include
a. What do you consider to be the joys or rewards of aging?
b. What are some of the problems or disadvantages?
c. How were you affected by your retirement? Was it a positive or negative experience?
d. What is your view of teenagers today?

5. **Observation** Observe people of all ages in a variety of settings, such as restaurants, malls, and offices. Do their clothing and actions fit age-appropriate norms of our culture? What exceptions do you note?

6. **The Elderly and Advertising** Analyze television commercials for the way older people are portrayed. How frequently are older people represented in advertising material? What types of products do they normally market? Is a pattern or stereotype being perpetuated by the television advertising community?

Technology Activity

1. The Center for the American Woman and Politics is a useful web site to find facts about women elected to public office in the United States. Go to its web site at http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cawp/. Select "State by State Fact Sheets" and then click on your state in the map that appears.
a. How many women are currently serving in your state's legislature?
b. Where does your state rank in comparison to other states?
c. When was a woman first elected to a statewide office or to the U.S. Congress?
d. Now click on "Facts Main Page" and select "Findings at a Glance" under the Publications heading. On page 4 of this document, find the three issues where gender differences in priorities were the greatest. What were they?
e. On page 7, were women more or less likely to conduct legislative business in the public view?
f. Based on your review of the "Findings at a Glance," do you think women make effective elected officials?

Chapter 10

Enrichment Reading

The Story of Baby X

by Lois Gould

"Once upon a time, a baby named X was born. This baby was named X so that nobody could tell whether it was a boy or a girl." So begins a children's story by Lois Gould about gender stereotypes.

X was given to Mr. and Ms. Jones, a couple carefully screened from thousands of applicants, as an experiment. The Joneses were to follow only one rule: X was not to be socialized as masculine or feminine, but was to learn everything a child could. Assisted by a heavy *Official Instruction Manual,* the Joneses promised to follow this rule as closely as possible. They agreed to take equal turns feeding and caring for X, to spend as much time bouncing as cuddling the baby, and to praise X for being strong just as often as for being sweet. But trouble began almost right away when the Joneses' friends and relatives asked whether X was a boy or a girl.

When the Joneses smiled and said "It's an X!" nobody knew what to say. They couldn't say, "Look at her cute little dimples." And they couldn't say "Look at his husky little biceps!' And they couldn't even say just plain "kitchy-coo." In fact, they all thought that the Joneses were playing some kind of rude joke.

The Joneses were, of course, being quite serious, but all the same, other people became irritated and embarrassed:

"People will think there's something wrong with it!" some of them whispered.

"There *is* something wrong with it!" others whispered back.

And what did baby X think about all the fuss? It simply finished its bottle with a loud and satis-fied burp.

Finding toys for X was another problem. The first trip to the toy store brought this immediate question from the store clerk: "Well, now, is it a boy or a girl?" In the storekeeper's mind, footballs and fire engine sets were for boys and dolls and housekeeping sets were for girls. But the Joneses knew that they had to be sure baby X had *all* kinds of toys to play with, including:

a boy doll that made pee-pee and cried "Pa-Pa." And a girl doll that talked. They also bought a storybook about a brave princess who rescued a handsome prince from his ivory tower, and another one about a sister and brother who grew up to be a baseball star and a ballet star, and you had to guess which was which.

But the biggest problem came when X was old enough to begin school, where the children were treated according to their sex. Boys and girls lined up separately, played games separately, and, of course, used different bathrooms. The other children had never met an X before, and just *had* to know what its sex really was. But the Joneses had raised X very carefully so that there was no easy answer:

You couldn't tell what X was by studying its clothes; overalls don't button right-to-left, like girl's clothes, or left-to-right, like boy's clothes. And you couldn't tell whether X had a girl's short haircut or a boy's long haircut. And it was very hard to tell by the games X liked to play. Either X

played ball very well for a girl, or else X played house very well for a boy.

The other children found X a very strange play-mate: one day it would ask boys to weave some baskets in the arts and crafts room, and the next day it would ask some girls to go shoot baskets in the gym. But X tried very hard to be friendly to everyone and to do well in school. And X did *very* well in school, winning spelling bees, athletic events and coming in second in a baking contest (even X's aren't perfect). As other children noticed what a good time X was having in school, they began to wonder if maybe X wasn't having twice as much fun as they were!

> From then on, some really funny things began to happen. Susie who sat next to X in class, suddenly refused to wear pink dresses to school any more. She insisted on wearing red-and-white checked over-alls—just like X's. Overalls, she told her parents, were much better for climbing monkey bars. Then Jim, the class football nut, started wheeling his little sister's doll carriage around the football field. He'd put on his entire football uniform, except for the helmet. Then he'd put the helmet *in* the carriage, lovingly tucked under an old set of shoulder pads. Then he'd start jog-ging around the field. He told his family that X did the same thing, so it must be okay. After all, X was now the team's star quarterback.

But this kind of behavior in the children horrified their parents. And when Peggy started using Joe's hockey skates while Joe enjoyed using Peggy's needlepoint kit, matters went from bad to worse. X was to blame for all this! So the Parents' Association at school demanded that X be iden-tified as a boy or a girl and be forced to act ac-cordingly. A psychiatrist was asked to conduct a full examination and report back to the parents. If, as most suspected, X was found to be a very confused child, it should be expelled from school altogether.

The teachers were puzzled by this; after all, X was one of their very best students. But the

school—as well as the Joneses—finally agreed to let X be examined.

The next day the psychiatrist arrived at the school and began a long examination of X while everyone waited anxiously outside. When the psychiatrist finally emerged from the examination room, the results were not what most people ex-pected. "In my opinion," the psychiatrist told them, "young X here is just about the *least* mixed up child I've ever examined!" The doctor ex-plained that by the time the X's sex really mat-tered, everyone would know what it was.

This, of course, made the Joneses very happy and delighted the scientists who had begun the ex-periment in the first place. And later that day, X's friends (dressed in red-and-white checked over-alls) came over to X's house to play. They found X in the backyard playing with a new tiny baby.

> "How do you like our new baby?" X asked the other children proudly.
> "It's got cute dimples," said Jim.
> "It's got husky biceps, too," said Susie.
> "What kind of baby is it?" asked Joe and Peggy.
> X frowned at them. Can't you tell?" Then X broke into a big mischievous grin. "It's a Y!"

Source: Adapted from Lois Gould, "X: A Fabulous Child's Story," *Ms.,* Vol. 1 (December, 1972):74–76, 105–106.

Read and React

1. What was your first reaction to this story?
2. Summarize the underlying hypothesis in the Baby X story.
3. Could a scientific experiment be constructed to test this hypothesis? If so, describe it. If not, explain why.
4. Discuss the ethical implications of such an experiment if one were conducted.
5. How does propaganda regarding childrearing affect differences in the socialization of males and females?