Chapter One

Introduction

Imagine that you wake up tomorrow and you have become a member of the "opposite" sex. Many things about your day will be unchanged: you will listen to the same music, wear the same clothes to class (whether blue jeans and a bright T-shirt or all black), spend some time at a job or hanging with friends, and enjoy the sunshine or complain about the rain. But many things about your day will be different.

For example, if you have become a woman, you may spend more time getting yourself ready to leave home. If you have become a man, you will probably have to be more careful about not doing anything that seems disrespectful of other males you encounter in public places. Becoming male may lead you to volunteering for the campus escort service, accompanying students who are concerned about walking on campus alone after dark; if you've become female, you may call for an escort. In addition, you may find your family responsibilities have changed. Newly male, you are expected to clear out the trash, or newly female, you are expected to get the dinner started when you return from campus. If you are a male who is expected to cook dinner, it will probably be something easier to prepare than what is on the menu for your female self.

Regardless of the change, you won't drop English composition or American history to meet graduation requirements. But if you have become male, you will be more likely to major in physics or philosophy than you are today, and if you have become female you are more likely to major in psychology or biology. You may work in a local restaurant today; tomorrow, though, the particular job you have in that restaurant may change. If you were female and waited on tables, you may now be washing dishes. If you were male and waited on tables, that restaurant may not be interested in your services at all. If you have become male, you may sit further back in the classroom than you did yesterday, whereas on becoming female, you may find some teachers don't call on you when you raise your hand. If you have become female, you may feel self-conscious when you realize you are the only nonmale working in the computer lab in the engineering building. If you have become male, you may lose the baby-sitting job you have today.

Would these changes in your daily life bother you? Do you assume you'd prefer them, that you would want different things and have different tastes if your sex changed? What if you did not want to go along with these differences? If you objected to such changes in your obligations and responsibilities, privileges and prohibitions,

what success would you have? Would your objections be respected, or would it be worth the trouble to object at all? Looking at these questions sociologically helps in understanding the processes that lead us to where we are and affects our chances of changing our circumstances.

Sociologists study the social meanings that groups build around the categories of female and male. We use **sexes** to refer to the categories that most contemporary societies define as physically based, despite the existence of many people whose bodies (genitally or genetically, or both) do not fit neatly into either a female or male category. Even though people increasingly also use the word gender to refer to those physically related categories, sociologists define **gender** as the totality of meanings that are attached to the sexes within a particular social system. More broadly, the **gender system** is a system of meaning and differentiation, linked to the sexes through social arrangements.

In the last hundred years, gender has been dynamic; a variety of the social meanings attached to the sexes have changed. Although the sorting of people into two categories continues, the socially constructed character of gender has become visible. In many ways, gender has become less obvious as a system that influences our lives. In particular, women's opportunities have expanded—from gaining the right to own property, to vote (in 1920, for white women and some women of color, and in the 1960s, for those disenfranchised on the basis of race rather than sex), to enter many occupations and professions previously closed to women, to work night shifts, to wear pants rather than skirts to school, work, and public accommodations, such as restaurants. Men's lives have changed as well—to the greater acceptance of fathers' involvement in the daily care of their children, to sharing the risk of asking someone for a date, to the acceptability of wearing more varied and colorful clothes.

In other ways, the meanings of gender have changed, but not lost, importance in our lives. For example, young women are not expected to be virgins at marriage (Brumberg 1997). Yet the expectations of the amount and the circumstances of young people's sexual activity are strongly differentiated between those for females and those for males, with a harsher judgment passed on young women who have had multiple sexual partners than on young men who have done so. Few men now succeed at work because of physical strength, but many use chemicals in pursuit of the embodiment of cultural notions of masculine size and strength.

Thus, the gender system has changed a great deal. Sociologists of gender focus on the nature of those changes, the forces that lead to them, and the obstacles to change. If we consider that some contemporary realities of the gender system are not fair, then we can learn from past experiences about the ways that struggles for justice have been successful.

What Is the Sociology of Gender?

The sociology of gender is an important aid to developing an accurate picture of the dynamic gender system, its influence on the lives of individuals and groups, and the kinds of human efforts that have led to a reduction of its influence.

Sociology is the study of people in groups; it examines the whole range of social phenomena—from relationships among individuals in the smallest groups to comparisons of whole societies and patterns of sociohistorical developments. In the study of gender, sociologists explore the meanings of maleness and femaleness in social contexts, examining the diversity of gender systems in various cultures and social groups. Sociologists take the view that gender is **socially constructed**, that is, the differences between females and males are not based in some biologically determined truth. For example, in the nineteenth century, affluent white women in the United States were expected to stay at home once their pregnancies were apparent (a period called "confinement") and to be treated as infirm for weeks after delivery. Enslaved women, in contrast, worked until going into labor and resumed work shortly afterward. The impact of pregnancy and childbirth on a woman's physical capacities was constructed differently depending on social categories other than her sex.

Sociologists investigate the significant impacts that social meanings of gender have on individual and collective experience, finding ways that social forces influence even physical differences between sexes. For example, the speed of female and of male runners is affected by opportunities and expectations, rather than being dictated by genetically linked differences. In the first decades after equal access to physical education was extended to girls, and notions of women's inherent limitations were challenged, one women's speed record after another fell, and the gap in speed between male and female champions was reduced. In this sense, social construction refers simply to the social forces that shape differences. If one must put up with being called a "tomboy" for being very active, she may decide not to, and her performance will suffer. If one must put up with being called a "sissy" or a "girl" for not being athletic, he may decide to put extra hours into practicing to develop whatever "natural" ability he might have.

But social construction has a stronger meaning as well; it refers to the social practice of perceiving and defining aspects of people and situations inconsistently, to force our observations to fit our social beliefs. Thus, before the women's movement (which started in the late 1960s), the scoring of vocational tests, taken by people to determine what careers they might best follow, was done with two answer keys—one for females and one for males. Even if your answers were identical to those of someone of the other sex, the vocational advice was different.

For a more dramatic example, the very notion that all humans can be clearly and without argument categorized as female or male is a social construction. Some people have chromosomal patterns associated with one sex, and they have primary (genital) sex characteristics or secondary (e.g., facial hair) sex characteristics, or both, associated with the other. Some people have genitalia that are not clearly what our culture labels either "male" or "female." These variations in people's biological characteristics are more common than our cultural beliefs suggest. Indeed, we are unable to know how common these variations are because we are unable (in the case of chromosomal difference) or unwilling (in the case of forcing those with visible characteristics labeled male and others labeled female into one of the two categories) to see the variability in the population. When a group, such as the International Olympic Committee, has the authority to decide which is the defining characteristic, a person who has thought herself or himself one sex may find she or he suddenly has been labeled as the other.

Sociologists of gender pursue questions about people and **social structure**: the pattern of social relationships and behaviors. They investigate gender in the smallest and most transitory collections, such as strangers' conduct in a public place, to the largest and most stable social groups, such as women's social power in agricultural and industrial societies. What makes an inquiry essentially sociological is the initial and fundamental expectation that patterns observed in social life, such as discriminatory practices and pay scales, are themselves strongly influenced (if not caused) by social forces. The search for social explanations for patterns in society is common to the various and often contrasting sociological theories that shape research projects.

Although the sociology of gender does address many popular questions, it uses a perspective unusual in the United States, where people tend to focus instead on the personal and psychological. In the pages that follow, the topics may seem familiar, but you may believe, at least initially, that the search for answers is misdirected. For example, many people within and outside of academia are interested in knowing the responsibilities that each spouse has around the house. It is easy to see a widespread pattern of husbands having fewer responsibilities at home than wives, regardless, it seems, of both husbands' and wives' other responsibilities. In accounting for this imbalance, sociologists are especially likely to look at associated factors, such as the differences between husbands' and wives' earnings. In contrast, you may be used to looking only at differences in personality or personal habits and tastes stemming from early childhood experiences.

The important causal role that sociologists expect to find for social forces contrasts sharply with the approaches taken in other social sciences as well as in popular explanations of social phenomena. Sociologists do sometimes focus on small groups, called the **micro-social** level. Even in micro-social studies, however, the sociological perspective differs from the psychological. Sociologists are unlikely to turn to personality or other individual characteristics for fundamental explanations as do psychologists. That is, psychologists more often than sociologists highlight early childhood differences in treatment of the sexes. Psychologists are also much more likely than sociologists to include or even emphasize biological factors in their explanation of gendered patterns.

Thus, sociologists studying how women workers and men workers are distributed into different occupations (such as secretaries and mechanics) will look for causes outside the individual worker. **Opportunity structures**, patterns of easier access to some positions than to others, exist before a person enters the labor market. When considering her or his possibilities, the person usually ignores jobs apparently held only or mainly by members of the other sex. This is especially likely if those jobs have significantly lower rates of pay than jobs held by people of one's own sex. Psychologists may want to know why some people choose jobs culturally defined as gender inappropriate, but sociologists are more interested in the existence and persistence of occupational sex segregation and its consequences for social life.

Sociologists talk about a **marginal** social position, or status when we are discussing people whose membership in some group or category is not socially defined as complete, who are instead seen as members of two different categories that in some way contradict one another. For example, a college student who has come back to school after military service is marginal, in that she or he is viewed as different in some

fundamental way from those who entered college directly from high school and have continued to attend without any leave of absence. Other students, faculty, and staff may have somewhat different expectations of, and behave differently toward that student. People outside school will probably view the veteran as not a "regular" member of the "adult" world because of the college student status.

Because so many social statuses have gendered expectations attached to them, people may often find themselves, one way or another, feeling marginal to some sphere of their social lives. This affects the way that they perform their roles and the ways that others interact with them, affecting how they are able to perform their roles. They will have to put more energy into establishing their credentials in each position to be treated as a legitimate occupant of it by others. If the veteran is a woman returning to military service, in some ways she will be marginalized; both male veterans and nonveteran females feel that she is somehow not a "regular" member of their own category. If you have read the last sentence believing that times have changed, go to your local post office and look at the forms for registering for the Selective Service. Men must register, and women cannot.

In sum, most sociologists think that when a person's characteristics conform to societal expectations, it is a result of the social contexts of their earlier experiences and current situations and not due to inevitable, biologically determined sex differences. We emphasize the ways that people's surroundings draw out particular behaviors from what is usually a broader repertoire of an individual's behaviors.

Contemporary sociologists view social life itself as gendered: Experiences, opportunities, and burdens are differentially available to males and to females because of social views about maleness and femaleness. The closing off or opening up of opportunities often occurs even for people who do not fit gendered expectations. For example, if nurturance is defined specifically as feminine, men will not have a chance to show that they are sufficiently nurturant to be hired as child care workers. If they do have a chance to show they are nurturant, they may find that higher standards are applied to them, to disprove the gendered expectations. Alternatively, they may be moved quickly into less nurturant administrative jobs, no longer implicitly challenging those gendered expectations.

In other words, social definitions of gender contribute to the social stratification of society and smaller social groups within it. **Social stratification** is the differentiation among people (on the basis of their membership in categories socially defined as significant) and the accompanying differences in their access to scarce resources and in the obligations they bear. To varying degrees, sociologists of gender focus on the ways in which particular combinations of gender, race and ethnicity, and social class are socially defined as justifying unequal social treatment.

Sociologists also view individuals' behavior as leading to changes in the social world. We study individuals' **agency**, or active approach to finding ways to participate in, adapt to, or change their circumstances. Although agency may be limited to creating means to survive within difficult social arrangements, it sometimes produces changes in the environment. Individually or together, people may affect their immediate (micro-social) surroundings. Human history is filled with stories of people changing the patterns in their societies or even globally. These national, multinational, and international levels are **macro-social**. Currently, many people in the United States are participating in activities aimed at ending the international sexual tourism trade,

which involves the prostitution of ever younger women and girls. This struggle includes people around the world who pressure governmental bodies to condemn child prostitution and to adopt programs that put muscle behind the condemnations.

Clearly, there is a **middle level** of social life, between units as big as nations and as small as a sociology class. Much of our micro-social life takes place within such middle-level settings as colleges, workplaces, and churches. When individuals actively attempt to change or to sustain existing arrangements, it is the middle level that may be most crucial for their focus. For example, if a married couple chooses to share equally in the care of their infant, their ability to do so will depend on being able to arrange suitable schedules at their workplaces and to earn prorated pay rather than taking a steep cut in earnings because of a change to part-time worker status. So the micro-social decision making about how the birth of the child may change the marriage is really not just about the couple. Indeed, they will have to work around the demands of their employers. In a strong economy, in which their employers are eager to keep workers on, the couple may have an easier time working out a good arrangement. But, a couple at the low end of the economic scale will probably not have such cooperative employers, nor the savings to afford losing earnings while being new parents. When public policies include support for working parents, however, employers may be legally required to provide more flexibility in scheduling. In other words, the macro-social level influences both the middle-level and micro-social possibilities. Using the concepts of these three levels helps sociologists to zero in on a particular question, but the three levels are actually always simultaneously important in understanding social life.

Thus, sociologists have a fundamental and broad assumption of the primacy of social factors in explaining many aspects of people's lives. We agree on the impact of **socialization**, or the process of learning the rules of the social group or culture to which we belong or hope to belong, and learning to define ourselves and others within that setting. We also agree on the impact of **social control**, the term for the myriad rewards (such as expensive wedding presents) and punishments (such as the fictional scarlet letter that Nathaniel Hawthorne's heroine was forced to wear for having had an adulterous relationship). Similarly, sociologists agree on the importance of social structure and of **culture**, a people's established beliefs and practices, their design for living. Nevertheless, sociologists have widely divergent ideas about the *best* ways to explain the social world. We do not always agree on the importance of each idea or its relative importance, such as social structure compared with culture, or socialization compared with social control.

This text, however, tends to emphasize the importance of social structural factors and social control, partly to counterbalance most students' familiarity with the prevalent belief in the United States that personality and the individual are the most important sources of difference in one's life experience.

Social Institutions and Social Change

The study of social institutions has a central place in the sociology of gender. A **social institution** is a constellation of activities and ideas that addresses a major area

of human need in a particular society. For instance, several basic human needs are addressed primarily and consistently in the institution of the family: sexual activity, reproduction, and the physical care of and early socialization of children. Virtually all people in the United States spend their earliest years in family contexts in which they are exposed to the significant cultural meanings of gender and receive their first and most intense lessons in gender relations on the micro-social scale. The specific relations may vary, but they typically fall within a recognizable range of acceptable behavior. These relations are broadly patterned in our culture even though they are acted out by individuals with unique personalities. Members of culturally diverse subgroups are similarly influenced by forces beyond the personalities of their intimates and themselves. When adults seek intimacy, parenthood, or practical living arrangements in which costs and labor are shared, their choices are limited by the patterns of family and household arrangements of the larger culture and by the particular variants of their immediate social environment. Obviously, the economic situation of a family also affects the alternatives available to its members.

Institutions are characteristically slow to change; major innovations are not easily integrated into institutions. As many activists have learned, new beliefs must eventually be supported by changes within institutionalized arrangements. Without such a process, holders of the new beliefs will remain on the social margin. For example, if a man who takes a paternity leave is subsequently penalized when personnel decisions are made, only those most highly committed to active parenting will consider taking a paternity leave. In contrast, if a father's use of leave is seen as a normal event, and his performance evaluation is not hurt by it, more men will take advantage of leave programs.

Once institutionalized changes occur, they facilitate the spread of new ideas and behaviors beyond their initial institutional context. For example, when a work organization develops and promulgates guidelines for dealing with allegations of sexual harassment, many individuals will start to think about the nature of male-female interaction in new ways beyond that specific organization. Even if they remain unconvinced that certain acts are harassing, what was previously unexamined becomes open to consideration. Thus, social change at the grass roots may sometimes be prodded by institutional changes. Institutions change at an uneven pace, with periods of little change and periods of rapid change. For instance, in 1991 President George Bush nominated Clarence Thomas to serve as a Supreme Court justice. During the constitutionally required Senate confirmation hearings, reports emerged that Judge Thomas had sexually harassed an attorney on his staff, Anita Hill. The confirmation hearings were televised live for three days, and the nation was caught up in a public debate over the meaning of sexual harassment. Without producing consensus about the problem, and with a senatorial decision to confirm Judge Thomas, the hearings nonetheless changed the ways in which individuals and work organizations regard the topic of sexual harassment.

More generally, the social implications of being female or male have changed rapidly since the late 1960s. Women's participation in the labor force has become typical, even for women with young children. Indeed, with the welfare reform legislation of 1996, the U.S. government embraced a definition of motherhood in which wage-

earning activity is more important than child care; previously, Aid to Families with Dependent Children provided a "safety net" for people unable to support their minor children themselves. Now, in both one- and two-parent families, if parents are able-bodied they are expected to work outside the home to support their children regardless of the children's ages, the inadequacies of alternative child care arrangements, and the inability to provide adequately for their children with the wages they are paid.

Men's labor force participation has declined slightly (Tang 1999), but is still **normative**; that is, it follows a social rule, or **norm,** for behavior. Despite media portrayals of househusband characters, the real "stay-at-home" father remains rare. He is almost always in the labor force and just working out of his home.

The kinds of work that women and men do, though still quite segregated, have been at least symbolically integrated (for example, the first woman to serve as the U.S. Attorney General was appointed in 1993). In some occupations, such as the legal profession, integration is more than token. Nonetheless, the comparable numbers of women and men in an occupation do not assure full equality; for instance, women attorneys remain very underrepresented in higher-status positions, specialties, and organizations.

Although it is now normative for women to work, it remains socially questionable for a woman to have a high-powered job that involves long absences from her children. If there has been any change in this area, it is toward expecting fathers to join mothers in greater involvement in the lives of their growing children. However, a man whose career keeps him away is considered to be merely in an unfortunate situation, but is not expected to move into a male equivalent of what is called the **mommy track**—a career ladder with limited prospects because the loyalties of women on it are presumed to be greater to family than to job. In some cases, men who participate actively in family care have discovered themselves on a "daddy" track, encountering some career limitations, although less extreme than those documented for the mommy track.

How much has changed? How do we know, stepping back from media portrayals and pop journalism? Throughout this text, we will see how sociologists and other social scientists have used systematically collected observations and critical thinking to address these questions.

The Development of Feminist Scholarship

Feminism is the view that women are oppressed in significant ways and that this oppression should be ended. Because of the wide variation in other beliefs that accompany this view, it is more accurate to refer to "feminisms" when discussing the belief systems of feminists. In every period of activism, feminists have energetically and intensely debated appropriate strategies, important goals, and their underlying assumptions about the sources of gender differentiation and of sexism. Even in quieter times, some of those who believe that women's oppression should be eliminated have worked for change.

Feminist analyses can also be thought of as falling along a continuum of perspectives on differences between women and men. At the *difference* end, feminists "focus on sexual and procreative oppression and . . . valorize women's procreative, sexual, and nurturance proclivities." This position calls for gender equity despite its fundamentally different characterizations of males and females. At the other end of the continuum, **equality** (as sameness) feminists base their advocacy of equitable treatment of people on a challenge to the social construction of the sexes as fundamentally different. The difference position makes the mistake of "treating all women as mothers (or as motherly) which we clearly are not" (Lorber 1989, 158). On the other hand, the equality position provides no intellectual approach to those still-significant differences common, if not universal, in a variety of aspects of women's and men's lives. Gender scholarship needs to be alert to the traps of the extreme positions on the continuum.

Though feminist views have been publicly expressed from time to time for hundreds of years (see Mary Wollstonecraft 1787), the first "wave," or period of feminist social activism in the United States, began in the mid-nineteenth century with the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention. That struggle focused primarily (but not exclusively) on equal legal rights for women, particularly the right to vote. Once women had the vote, activists believed, they could tackle other areas of legal injustice. The struggle for national suffrage lasted until 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified. Both equality and difference feminism had adherents during this period. Difference feminists argued that the horrors of war would be less likely if women—nurturing rather than combative by nature—had the vote. Equality feminists actively pursued economic rights such as the right of a widow to own the family farm that had been in her husband's name.

> "I myself have never known what feminism is.
> I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat."
>
> —Rebecca West, 1913

Even though the "first wave" refers to the entire period between the Seneca Falls meeting until the achievement of suffrage in 1920, it actually included periods of greater and lesser activism (Springer 2002). Like all metaphors, the idea of feminist activism as occurring in "waves" has drawn attention to some kinds of activities and rendered others invisible. African American women struggled against sexism and racism (the systems of prejudicial beliefs and discriminatory behaviors toward people because of their race or because of their sex) even before the abolitionist movement, which is generally credited with giving rise to the first wave. And between the first and second waves, African American women's organizations continued to struggle against ongoing **racism** and **sexism**.

Feminist activism decreased after the achievement of the vote, as some supporters saw their goal achieved and as others' differing goals for further progress led to a splin-

tering of movement organizations. The first wave included the active participation of women of color, immigrant women, and women of various social class positions. The pursuit of rights for women of color was sometimes set aside by white leaders, who argued that taking on race privilege at the same time as gender privilege would increase resistance from those opposing (white) women's suffrage. White planners of a famous suffragist parade on President Wilson's inauguration day (1916) told African American suffragists they would have to march separately from whites, although not all complied with this order.

The women's movement, or the "second wave" of feminist activism, started in the late 1960s and remained intense during the 1970s (see Chapter Seven for more detail about the development of both the first and second waves). As a result of the activism during that period, people have come to look at the social world in profoundly different ways. Social conditions, such as sexual harassment, marital rape, and domestic violence, that are now considered serious problems were invisible forty years ago. The conditions are not new, but the social perception of them is, and so is the insistence that society confronts rather than denies them.

Current views of the second wave generally lack awareness of the many conflicts and challenges among second-wave feminists holding varied intellectual positions and political goals (Armstrong 2002). This is consistent with other histories of social movements: The positions that end up triumphing over their competitors are present in historical accounts, and other positions become invisible. Current views also erase the racial/ethnic and social class diversity within the second wave. It is typically constructed as exclusively white and middle class. This makes invisible a wide variety of women who participated in caucuses within male-run organizations, who participated in organizations formed and led by women of color, and who sometimes collaborated in and even led groups with majority white participation (Evans 2003). Women of color who spoke and worked against sexist practices within their community often faced charges of race disloyalty, a charge with greater penalties when brought against women than men (Cole and Guy-Sheftall 2003, 99). Echoing the 1916 experience of racist behavior by white women, African American men refused to let any women leaders be speakers at the enormous civil rights demonstration in Washington (August 1963) at which Martin Luther King, Jr., made his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Although important feminist scholarship was accomplished between the periods of intense political activism (for example, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, first published in France in 1949, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique,* in 1963), the huge growth in self-consciously feminist scholarship was simultaneously produced by and influential in the women's movement. As academic feminism flourished, many scholars found themselves simultaneously interested in a critical theoretical and research stance and in achieving success within the traditionally structured, male-dominated professoriate. Activists and scholars were found along the full length of the "equality-difference" continuum. Difference feminists were most often white and middle class, privileged to ignore the real differences among women of varied social class and racial-ethnic positions. This led to an emphasis on problems, such as rape and domestic abuse, shared by most women and different from those of men. They

paid little attention to problems that did not affect them, such as discriminatory management and labor union practices that kept women out of dangerous but relatively well-paid blue-collar work. Equality feminists, more diverse in composition, were more likely to be interested in achieving equity with men, for example, in the payment of social security benefits and the premiums charged for life insurance policies.

During the 1990s, some young feminists started calling themselves the "third wave," referring to their generation as distinct from those who participated in the "second wave." Feminists who grew up during the 1980s and 1990s were exposed to backlash against the women's movement. By this time, many took the achievements and issues of the movement for granted. Yet, the third wave has moved its focus to new challenges opened up by the greater freedoms achieved by the second wave. For example, questions about combining home and work lives are now different for these women, who have a greater range of career opportunities. If one is on a real career track, leaving work to fulfill home responsibilities can seriously damage future opportunities. On the other hand, to maintain a career and develop a partnership, or to parent, or to do all of these, is not viable unless one is a superwoman. Third-wave feminists have also grown up hearing about the importance of differences among women, particularly women of different racial-ethnic identities, social class positions, and sexuality. Solidarity among feminists of different generations has often been elusive in part because younger women were unaware of the wide range of feminist views and actions of preceding generations (Evans 2003; Radford-Hill 2002).

Cultural symbols that had one clear meaning in the 1970s have very different, often multiple meanings now. For example, although Madonna's explicit sexuality could be interpreted as catering to the **commodification** of women (i.e., turning women's bodies into objects of economic value), it is generally interpreted as the embracing of the sexual freedom that women fought to achieve in the 1960s and 1970s (*The Righteous Babes* 1998). Sometimes social rules are assumptions about sexuality. This example, subjected to intense discussion, illustrates the simultaneous use of traditional images of the objects of heterosexual male desire with a challenge to it. Increasingly, feminist scholars look at practices in which women appear to simultaneously conform to and challenge social arrangements they find oppressive in groups or communities to which they are loyal. Making sense of such apparently contradictory positions, and others that may be less obvious, is one facet of contemporary feminist scholarship.

Violence in the home (e.g., wife battering, child abuse, and marital rape) and sexual harassment in the workplace have been focuses of growing intellectual and political activity since the early 1970s. Other problems have more recently gained public attention and are increasingly recognized as serious and widespread; "date rape" is one such recently introduced topic that is actually not a new phenomenon at all. However, studying newly visible problems requires more than becoming aware of their existence, and many scholars argue that other ways of looking at the world are required for achieving a nonsexist understanding of it.

Itself a product of the 1970s wave of the women's movement, the sociology of gender is a major area of feminist scholarship, with active building of feminist theory and lively debate about what is required for a methodology to be feminist. Because of the

centrality of social change to feminist belief, it is not surprising that feminist scholarship is forthright about the legitimacy of addressing politically important questions in the pursuit of knowledge. It is not always the case that the sociology of gender is conducted from a feminist perspective, but this text is firmly situated in the feminist tradition.

Early in the study of gender, attention was paid mainly to the ways sexism limited females' lives. As in the popular culture, the social constraints on boys' and men's lives were rarely considered problematic. In part, this inattention reflected the view that behaviors usually considered out of bounds for men (such as the public expression of emotions other than anger) were unimportant or even undesirable because these were associated with women. Limits on men were an integral part of the justification for men's superior position in the stratification system. For example, men are less free than women to show feelings of panic or helplessness; but women have been excluded from certain positions because of this very freedom. It constructs women as unreliable—they might panic or act helpless! However, some people now reject this notion and believe that women can serve well even in positions such as combat soldiers. Perhaps with the basis of women's exclusion being eroded, men's emotional toughness may be less useful in justifying their dominance, and they may be freer to appear emotionally vulnerable. Indeed, some men have noted that this is an effective way to present themselves when they want to appear attractive to women!

In the 1970s, ideas of what equality would mean typically highlighted the expansion of women's freedom. Instead of women gaining some of the freedoms of men, there are areas in which the growing equality of the sexes is associated with men's loss of freedom. For example, men are expected to meet increasingly unrealistic standards for appearance, and are a rapidly growing clientele for cosmetic surgery. The study of men *as* men is a growing interdisciplinary area within the social sciences and humanities (Brod 1987; Connell 1995). It reflects in part the increased recognition of cultural values other than economic and political power. For example, there is a growing acknowledgment of men's increasing involvement in parenting and, thus, a growing interest in learning more about that involvement. The sociology of sport has been another particularly fruitful area of research on masculinities and femininities and their ongoing negotiation.

Leading Perspectives

Feminist theorizing and feminist analysis are now being done by sociologists working outside the study of gender itself. Feminist analysis is making important contributions to other sociological specialties and to other disciplines (see England 1999; Ferree, Hess, and Lorber 1999). For example, child psychologists had long studied the effects of "maternal deprivation," which referred to children whose mothers spent the day at workplaces and to children whose mothers had died or were otherwise permanently absent. When the question was reframed to consider the effects of "maternal absence," researchers were more likely to see neutral or positive influences on children as well as negative ones.

A wide range of perspectives can be called feminist even though media references to feminists and feminism typically assume that all feminists think the same way (for an excellent introduction see Lorber 2001b; Gimenez 2004). In three decades of active feminist scholarship, numerous scholars have tried to categorize the major feminist perspectives. This is somewhat ironic because much feminist work actually criticizes the use of categories and types, for prematurely closing off inquiry.

Nonetheless, many of us have a preference that we usually follow. Every scholarly perspective (whether or not it is feminist) is concerned with somewhat different sets of questions about the social world, and each gives rise to hypothesized answers that emphasize different aspects of the social world. Even when scholars address similar issues, if they use different perspectives they tend to look for different causes. For example, many researchers are interested in the current phenomenon of young women's eating problems, but differ in where they look for both causes and solutions. Some authors explicitly identify the perspective from which they work, but many actually use more than one perspective. Of course, scholars starting from the same perspective do not always agree on all questions.

One common categorization of feminist perspectives dominant in the sociology of gender during the 1970s and 1980s includes *liberal feminist, socialist feminist,* and *radical feminist* approaches. In the United States, *multiracial feminism, postmodern* and *poststructural feminisms,* and *global feminism* have more recently grown in popularity among sociologists. Some perspectives complement one another while focusing on different questions, but others actually have contradictory premises. Nonetheless, each provides us with useful insights. Rather than viewing the lack of agreement on a single perspective (and even a lack of agreement on how to categorize the variety of viewpoints) as symptomatic of a problem in feminist studies, such a variety of perspectives indicates the robustness of the field. In the following pages, I describe the perspectives you will encounter in this text. **Liberal feminism** is rarely encountered among contemporary researchers in the sociology of gender; its relatively narrow approach is seen as outmoded. Rather than focusing on the underlying stratification of U.S. society, it emphasizes "leveling the playing field" between females and males (see Lorber 2001b). But it does not challenge the scarcity that would remain (and be inequitably experienced) if women stopped being denied a chance to play on that field simply because they are women. Nonetheless, liberal feminism remains important for people interested in the presence and extent of sexism in the treatment of individuals who are otherwise in relatively privileged categories.

More than any other perspective, this text takes a **multiracial feminist perspective**, developed in recent work, particularly by feminist sociologists of color (see, for example, Dill and Baca Zinn 1996; Glenn 2002). This approach is **intersectional**, in that it highlights the simultaneous impact of race, class, gender, and sexuality in formulating questions and looking for answers about gender. For example, we cannot understand the situations and experiences of African American women by simply adding up what we know about the situations of some "average" woman and some "average" African American person. An African American woman may suffer more or less than the sum of the discriminatory treatments experienced by the "average" member of these two categories separately (Crenshaw 1989), and understanding her experiences

will be further clarified by paying attention at the same time to her social class position and her sexuality.

Multiracial feminism makes the important point that race and class are relevant in research about white, middle-class, and heterosexual women. Their lives are influenced by divisions based on race, class, and sexuality, typically to their advantage (Smith 1999). To ignore that influence is to give a partial and distorted explanation for their situation (Frankenberg 1993). Similarly, studying people of both sexes adds to the understanding of each, because gender is relational. The social meanings attached to femaleness or maleness depend, that is, on the meanings attached to the other sex and gender.

The multiracial approach tends to look for causes of gender-related problems in macro-social and middle-level arenas. It emphasizes the importance of social structure in shaping the inequalities in opportunities and obstacles. These structural factors are associated with some combination of cultural beliefs about race, sex, age, sexuality, and economic position. This complexity adds to the accuracy this view provides. At the same time, it is difficult to pay attention simultaneously to all dimensions of difference. Sociological tradition values the development of generalizations and working toward the development of abstract theories that explain many observations of the social world. However, the emphasis on difference can slow down progress toward generalization and theory building.

Particularly with the move toward intersectionality, sociologists have come to recognize the multiplicity of femininities and masculinities. **Doing gender**, or trying to act womanly or manly, has different meanings depending on one's location in the social structure (Connell 1995). For example, a working-class man may establish his masculinity by his physical strength or his physical bravery (e.g., fire fighting), while an upper-middle-class man is able to establish his masculinity by providing a very comfortable home and other material assets to his family. Although physical strength and bravery are dominant as measures of masculinity in youth, economic achievement is the highest indicator of adult manliness. Indeed, a very wealthy middle-aged man who is not physically attractive or strong may marry a trophy wife—a younger and attractive woman who symbolizes his achievements.

Nonetheless, in the absence of opportunities to achieve economic success, that most prestigious and powerful version of manliness, there are alternatives available to men. Those born into settings with no visible hope of economic success may not think of their versions of masculinity as second best. However, that is the assessment of the larger culture.

Thinking about eating problems, Thompson (1992) used a multiracial feminist perspective. She argued that eating problems, rather than "disorders," is a more accurate term. It does not locate the source of the trouble in the individual, as disorder implies. Indeed, she argued that eating problems may stem from rational choices (such as the choice to become less attractive to lower the chances of being sexually victimized). She challenged the race- and class-limited explanation of eating disorders that focuses attention solely on the "cult of thinness." For example, she discussed eating as one of the few affordable and reliable sources of enjoyment in some women's lives and suggested that overeating may be a choice, rather than a compulsion.

More recently, Hesse-Biber (1996) described an increased interest in thinness among young, occupationally successful African American and Latina women. She suggested that white, middle-class ideas about body shape are spreading, shared along class lines. Clearly, an intersectional approach will develop a more accurate picture of the extent and kinds of eating problems in contemporary U.S. society. Such accuracy will help design more effective solutions to the variety of eating problems.

Socialist feminism and racial and ethnic studies were the leading influences in the development of multiracial feminism. The **socialist feminist** view weighs **patriarchy** (the social domination by males over females) and **capitalism** (the economic system of private ownership of production, with the paramount value of maximizing profit) as equally important forces in explaining inequalities in society. By examining differences among men (in their access to power and other resources), we are better able to explain the different ways in which men exploit women. Thus, economic stratification among men as well as women is viewed as an essential part of the contemporary system of patriarchy. Feminists who were socialists developed this position in reaction to the secondary position most socialist theorists traditionally assigned to gender in their explanations of social life (England 1999).

Socialist feminists draw attention to the ways patriarchal beliefs divide groups that might otherwise unite to unseat the economically powerful through coalition. The socialist feminist is interested in the economically disadvantaged of both sexes and all races, in people of color of both sexes and all economic positions, and in women of all races and economic positions. Socialist feminists would not disagree with a multiracial feminist view, but as a matter of practice have emphasized social class over racial-ethnic differences in seeking explanations of inequality. Thus, socialist feminists emphasize the interest that people in power have in maintaining the status quo. They focus on the social relations of power (especially economic power) that enable men to control women (Sokoloff 1980, 154). A socialist feminist approach to current eating problems might focus on the enormous commercial investment that companies have in creating and maintaining women's obsession with size, shape, and muscle tone (see Brumberg 1997).

Although multiracial feminism is the major perspective taken in this text, in some discussions I employ ideas associated with radical feminism. **Radical feminists** view gender as the crucial dimension dividing people. They focus on how males dominate women through a system of supporting beliefs and social structures. Power differences among women, and the role of other dimensions of difference, such as class and race, are not central to a radical feminist analysis. Although narrow, this perspective can provide a useful analysis by generalizing about women's experiences where such generalizations are appropriate. For example, a radical feminist approach to eating problems might look at the ways in which women are oppressed by patriarchal standards of appearance. In addition, a radical feminist approach would highlight the greater demand for resources of time, energy, and money required for women to meet standards of appearance required for occupational or social success. Although a multiracial feminist might argue that there are important differences among women in the appearance expectations related to jobs, any explanation of body problems in the United States will be more robust if it recognizes the relatively greater emphasis on women's appearance compared with men's.

One of the most recent developments is the growth of **global feminism**, which puts at the center of its analysis the study of gender across national and regional boundaries. It challenges many presumptions of Western feminists, sometimes simply by making visible what those (particularly in the United States) have ignored. For example, the intertwined character of the current global economy has generally received attention only when it disadvantages the economic arrangements in the United States. Global feminists draw attention to the dependence of affluent U.S. families on the grossly underpaid labor of workers from other countries, whether in the United States (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) or in their home or in other countries where their cheap labor produces goods for export. Global feminists also reject the dismissal as sexist of non-Western cultures' patriarchal belief systems, instead calling for and conducting analyses of the complexities of practices and beliefs previously often only superficially examined by Western feminists.

Finally, in some sections of the text, I take a view that might be considered *postmodern* or *poststructural feminism.* Although it is not a central perspective in the sociology of gender, **postmodern feminism** makes some unique contributions to our understanding of women and men in contemporary society. At the core of postmodernism is the drive to unsettle or destabilize existing assumptions about how the world works. Postmodern thinkers emphasize the temporary and local nature of reality. Because they view life as socially constructed, they see it as ever changing, often profoundly. In our context, postmodernism has been important in questioning the categories we use, as U.S. sociologists, as feminist social scientists, or more generally as participants in contemporary American society and culture (Lorber 1999). Perhaps the most challenging is the position that even the two sexes are categories that are socially created, rather than existing biologically (see, for example, Stoltenberg 1990). **Poststructuralism** also rejects the possibility of somehow discovering a set of "underlying rules, codes, and systems that govern social phenomena" (Petersen 2003, 55), but differs from postmodernism in its emphasis on the distribution of power in a society to explain the forms that social constructions take. Taking this perspective, we can look at how those who lack power make use of cultural forms to express their resistance to hegemonic arrangements or constructions. Ironically, the poststructuralist simultaneously highlights the significance of (presumably real) power differences and the social-political-economic system of society, while espousing the socially constructed nature of cultural forms, ideas, and roles.

This emphasis on social construction is productive, making it easier for us to "break frame," "step out of the box," or overcome assumptions that have kept us from seeing aspects of the world that don't fit our expectations. The importance of this contribution cannot be overstated. However, the postmodern and poststructural approaches dispute the possibility of valid generalization, and generalization is an essential feature of contemporary sociology.

In sum, each perspective highlights fruitful areas of inquiry, but by itself it would draw an incomplete picture. Thus, liberal feminism's examination of the ways in which the culture is brought home to individuals through socialization helps solve the puzzle of people's behaving in ways that apparently contradict their self-interest, and helps explain the mechanism by which changes in institutions are often followed by

changes in individuals' worldviews. Radical feminism's focus on the shared experiences of women helps make sense of employment discrimination based on assumptions of biologically inevitable physical weakness or emotional vulnerability. Multicultural feminism brings attention to the conflicting interests among women by insisting we look simultaneously at their variation in class, racial-ethnic, and sexual identities. Finally, a poststructural approach directs our attention to the ongoing construction of meaning in people's daily lives and the need to explore those meanings rather than imposing our own.

Feminist Methods of Inquiry

Conceptualizing questions, choosing subject matter for study, defining the basic strategy of a research project—all are influenced, even if unconsciously, by the values and worldview of the researcher. Until the feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970s, social research was blind to the importance of gender. Men dominated the social organization of scholarship, and for men gender was not problematic. Like privileged racial or social class groups, people in the more privileged sex category are unlikely to see the multiplicity of ways that being male makes a difference in how they are treated in the social world (McIntosh 1988).

Many studies included only male respondents; it was simpler to limit the sample to only one sex, and men were assumed to be the sex to study. An early strategy to improve scholarship, nicknamed "add women and stir," brought women into the topic to be studied, but did not rethink assumptions about the topic that were rooted in its male-focused research tradition. This limited approach has been rejected as inadequate. Instead, investigative strategies and their theoretical bases have to be rethought. As long as research questions were designed with a single "normal" experience in mind (usually that of a middle-class white man), central issues were likewise ignored.

In the first decades of research on wife battering, most studies focused on the kinds of individuals involved in battering and the relationships in which battering occurs, searching for explanations in individual characteristics without reference to the larger social, political, and economic environment. Instead, as Fine (1989) argued, a feminist approach to studying wife battering would include questions about cultural and social influences. What aspects of the larger environment actually foster battering, what aspects simply take it for granted, and what aspects work to reduce domestic violence against women?

Even when researchers focus on topics including women and women's interests, the manner of thinking about central ideas needs attention. For example, when Sacks (1988) studied the drive for unionization at the Duke Medical Center, she identified leadership activities that were different among women than among men. Being the spokesperson in large meetings or the representative to outsiders is central to the male norm for leadership. If being defined as a leader were based only on being a spokesperson, the significant daily contributions of women leaders would be ignored. Instead, Sacks broadened the definition of leadership to include the importance of developing and maintaining group commitment.

How people create conceptual categories affects our thinking about observations related to those categories. Imagine that apples and oranges had been categorized only as appanges (or oraples) and that researchers, visiting different orchards (or groves), described many contradictory features (best climate for growing the fruit, appearance of the fruit, in/edible character of the skin). If someone introduced the distinction between apples and oranges, however, many of the apparent contradictions would disappear. Though variations would remain within each of the new categories (such as the color of apples), much more can be clearly and consistently described and understood because the division "works"—it fits the observations. For example, Johnson (1995) developed a distinction between different types of domestic violence—"patriarchal terrorism" and "common couple violence." By thinking of individual episodes of violence as one or the other of these types, he made sense of previously contradictory sets of research findings, most important, major differences in the extent to which these acts are gendered (as discussed in Chapter Four).

Feminist scholars have argued that basic ethnographic research should always come before survey research in gathering evidence to address a research question (see Naples 2003). Surveys, and quantitative analyses of their results, are the dominant methodological form in contemporary sociology. Ethnography is the use of some combination of observation and participation by the researcher(s) in the social context being studied. Ethnography develops a textured and complex understanding of the site in which the research is conducted. Generalization to a larger population is possible from large surveys, and not from ethnographic research, but the ethnographer can inform the survey researcher about the deeper meaning of phenomena on which her survey may focus. Thus, before developing quantitative research designs (e.g., surveys), we must first broaden our understanding of their range of meanings for all the people involved in the phenomena.

For example, before we can do a large survey of undergraduates to find explanations of gender differences in majors, we need to speak in depth with some students to develop the survey questions themselves. We may assume women avoid mechanical engineering because of a misperception that they would get greasy doing it; but through ethnographic work, we might find out that professors in mechanical engineering are more likely than, for example, professors in chemical engineering to assume that theirs just isn't a field for women. The ethnographic work in a few engineering schools could lead to a survey of a broader range of engineering faculty and students. Sprague and Zimmerman (1989) argue that an effective feminist methodology will require a reconstruction of methods to include an integration of aspects of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Regardless of their position in the ongoing debate about the particular methods that are consistent with feminist inquiry, most people accept that researchers should make their assumptions explicit so that others may be alert to possible distortions. This view of knowledge has contributed significantly to progress toward more valid approximations of truth through intellectual effort. Discussion of **epistemology** (or ways of knowing) is traditionally a matter for philosophers. Since the late 1980s, feminist epistemology has been an increasingly important area where scholars of disci-

Central Variations in Approaching the Study of Gender

Despite the popular social construction of feminism and of women's studies, there are many variations in the assumptions and the approaches taken by feminist social scientists. Some dimensions along which feminist scholarship varies are represented by the following questions. In addition to illustrating the variation among social scientists, these questions allow each of us to reflect on the assumptions on which we base our own ideas as we participate in everyday conversations, make decisions about how to behave or assess others' behavior, and consider what we want the organizations and governments around us to do. As you review each question, think of possible answers along a continuum, rather than as an either/or, such as a strong **"yes"** or **"no,"** or an intractable **"all"** or **"none."**

1. How important is one's gender fundamentally?
2. What are the significant causes of, or influences on, the gender system? What is the relative importance of biology, personality, social group memberships, nationality, historical moment, economics, and politics?
3. How central are race-ethnicity, class, and sexuality to the way one thinks about gendered patterns or the gender system?
4. How much and what kinds of attention are paid to boys and men when we shape the questions to be examined and look for answers to those questions?
5. What counts as evidence?
6. To what extent are these ideas of ours based on knowledge of communities, regions, or countries other than our own? ✦

plines across the humanities and the social sciences draw upon one another's work (see, for example, Sprague and Kobrynowicz 1999).

Technology and Social Change

For much of the twentieth century, U.S. sociology emphasized a view and explanation of social reality as stable; researchers in this discipline tacked on questions of how change occurs almost as an afterthought. The shift to change-oriented analysis, which began to gather steam in the 1970s, is particularly well-suited to the study of gender. Because of changes both in the status of women and men in many arenas and in the ways in which scholars have approached gender (in the development of theories, the re-creation of methodologies, and the selection of research questions), the field has grown and changed remarkably within its relatively short existence. A view of social

life as *normally* dynamic rather than static is integrated throughout this volume; in the final chapter, we focus particularly on social change and the future.

An important impetus for changing gender relations comes from developments in technology. For example, lack of control over the timing of pregnancies often undermined both employers' and individual women's willingness to invest resources in job training. The development of increasingly reliable contraception removed a major obstacle to women's employment possibilities (Goldin and Katz 2000). But, the development of the Internet and the availability of violent pornography remind us that technological changes are not always liberating (Gossett and Byrne 2002).

Although it is widely recognized that technologies, and developments in them, affect social arrangements, we generally ignore the enormous importance of social arrangements in shaping the directions and implementation of technological innovation. Thus, research into the development of new contraceptive technologies continues to assume that women are primarily responsible for contraception and that their biology, rather than men's, should be tinkered with (Oudshoorn 2003). The victims in Web-circulated violent pornography are disproportionately women of color, particularly women who appear to be Asian, reflecting dominant cultural beliefs about the variation in sexual attractiveness and availability (Gossett and Byrne 2002).

The design of new technologies is typically intended to be consistent with cultural norms regarding gender, race, class, and age. However, unintended consequences of new technologies sometimes lead to changes in the culturally dominant forms of masculinity and femininity and to changes in distribution of power in the system of gender. For example, the reliability of the birth-control pill allows single women to be sexually active without depending on a male partner's cooperation with the use of a condom.

Even where no change in the gender hierarchy results from a particular technological change, this innovation may well have implications for the everyday realities of gendered roles. Thus, the microwave oven (based on a technology initially designed decades before) was developed and became a household "necessity" only in the 1970s, when more and more women were working outside the home. Nonetheless, planning meals (even those to be cooked or reheated in the microwave) remained largely the woman's responsibility. Indeed, when the microwave enabled a greater variety of meals to be prepared with relatively little effort (compared with the premicrowave era), those responsible for household shopping and menu planning were expected to provide for the individual likes and dislikes of each family member. The shopping and menu planning may have become more complex, counterbalancing any time gained by using the microwave oven. Thus, we see that technological innovations are themselves social products, rather than objectively inevitable developments; they are influenced by the gender system as well as influencing it.

Similarly, mechanization decreased the importance of physical strength in men's labor, although it was not intended as a means of interfering with gender arrangements. Physical strength is now largely irrelevant in most jobs, and working-class men have to turn elsewhere to establish their masculinity. You will encounter other instances of the "chicken and egg" relationship between gender systems and technologies in this book.

Looking Ahead

You started the chapter with a "thought experiment" about the impact on your life if tomorrow you switched your sex. Much of your challenge would involve changing how you present yourself (through symbols and language) and how you interpret others' words and appearance. As you move through the following chapters, keep this experiment in mind. In the next chapters, you will examine culture (Chapter Two), and how people learn about it and work to maintain or change it in their own lives (Chapter Three).

Most of the implications of your "switching" would depend on how the social institutions in which you participate are themselves gendered. In Chapter Four, we look at the institution of the family as a social structure and as the primary setting of our socially intimate relationships. This is followed by examinations of three other major social institutions: education (Chapter Five), the economy (Chapter Six), and the political and legal systems (Chapter Seven).

Finally, this book will focus on social changes both intentionally and unintentionally affecting gender relations and gender systems (Chapter Eight). This last chapter will help you to think about what the outcome of that experiment might be if you repeated it in 2025 and what might happen between now and then to create a new outcome.

Discussion Questions

1. The chapter began with a thought experiment in which you woke up as a person of the other sex. Now imagine that you wake up as a person of that sex, but it is 2030. Do you expect the implications of this "sex change" to be less broad, or about the same (or even more important)? Why do you think so? Consider the same questions for the year 1970.

2. One of the traditional ways in which sociologists learn about the world is by observing it as they participate in it. Which of your ideas about how the world works do you think you might reconsider if you observed it as a person of another sex, racial-ethnic group, and social class?

3. At this point, what do you think are some of the most interesting (or puzzling, or disturbing) patterns of gender in contemporary life? Which of the feminist perspectives described in this chapter seems best suited to pursuing these topics, and why do you think so? ✦