
Gender Inequality



AP Photo/Noah Berger

Learning Objectives (1 of 2)

- Understand the ways that differences between women and men reflect biological factors, sociocultural influences, and the complex interplay between the two.
- Recognize and contrast competing explanations for gender inequality. Learn some feminist theories about gender equality.

Learning Objectives (2 of 2)

- Learn how gender differences are a part of our social structure and create inequalities between men and women. Learn the forms these inequalities take in social institutions such as the workplace, the family, the educational system, and the political system in the United States and globally.
- Understand how sex segregation contributes to the gender gap in pay, learn about family-leave policies in other countries, explore the effects of gender inequality on men, and evaluate the competing explanations for the persistence of gender-based violence.

Intersectionality

- **Intersectionality:** A sociological perspective that holds that our multiple group memberships affect our lives in ways that are distinct from single group memberships.
- For example, the experience of a Black female may be distinct from that of a White female or a Black male.

Intersectionality

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQ9FHc>

10.1 Basic Concepts

Sex and Gender

- **Sex:** The biological and anatomical differences distinguishing females and males.
- **Gender:** Social expectations about behavior regarded as appropriate for the members of each sex. Gender refers not to the physical attributes distinguishing men and women but to socially formed traits of masculinity and femininity.
- Sex and gender can be fuzzy and overlapping, rather than rigid and binary.

Gender Role Socialization

- **Gender role socialization:** The learning of gender roles through social factors such as schooling, the media, and family.
- **Social construction of gender:** The learning of gender roles through socialization and interaction with others.
- **Hegemonic masculinity:** Social norms dictating that men should be strong, self-reliant, and unemotional.

Understanding Sex Differences: The Role of Biology (1 of 2)

- **Biological essentialism:** The view that differences between men and women are natural and inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological natures of men and women.
- Nearly all social scientists agree that theories based solely on an innate predisposition neglect the vital role of social interaction in shaping human behavior.

Understanding Sex Differences: The Role of Biology (2 of 2)

- There might be slight biological differences between men and women, but these small differences may be exacerbated and amplified by social contexts that promote behaviors that are consistent with gendered stereotypes and expectations.

Gender Socialization: How Gender Differences Are Learned (1 of 3)

- Children are guided through the process of learning gender by positive and negative sanctions, or socially applied forces that reward or restrain behavior.
- According to functionalist perspectives, socializing agents help maintain the smooth continuation of the existing social order by overseeing the smooth gender socialization of new generations.

Gender Socialization: How Gender Differences Are Learned (2 of 3)

- Critics of the functionalist perspective argue that gender socialization is not a smooth process, and different agents like families, schools, and peer groups may be at odds with one another.
- Socialization theories also ignore individuals' ability to reject or modify the social expectations surrounding sex roles. Gender is a product of individual choices and preferences, as well as social, contextual, and biological influences.

Gender Socialization: How Gender Differences Are Learned (3 of 3)

- Asking, “Is it a boy or a girl?” implies that sex matters because parents will raise boys and girls in different ways.
- Sociological studies repeatedly show that once a gender is “assigned,” society expects individuals to act like “females” and “males.”



Jennie Hart/Alamy Stock Photo

The Social Construction of Gender: How We Learn to “Do Gender”

- Theorists who believe in the social construction of gender reject all biological bases for gender differences.
- Precisely how we “do” gender varies widely by race, social class, and social context.
- We selectively choose to enact different aspects of gender expectations based on what we think will work best in a particular setting.

The Social Construction of Gender: How We Learn to “Do Gender”

- Doing Gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987)
 - refers to the way that a person **performs** activities as a man or as a woman, and how the performance is judged by others
 - Gender as a socio-psychological construct; “Doing gender” as an ongoing activity embedded in **everyday interaction**
 - Doing gender creates social differences between men and women. The physical features of social setting provide resource for the expression of gender differences.
 - E.g. The gender segregation of public bathrooms

Social Construction of Gender in Other Cultures

- In New Guinea's Arapesh and Mundugumor tribes, men and women were expected to behave similarly to each other. In the Tchambuli tribe, male and female roles were reversed from the traditional Western roles.
- The !Kung have specific gender roles, but men and women both perform child care and oppose violent conflict.
- The *bacha posh* in Afghanistan are daughters whose parents dress and treat them as sons so they can experience the advantages awarded to boys.

Blurring the Boundaries Between the Genders (1 of 2)

- Adherence to the gender binary is not universal.
- Growing numbers of U.S. young adults are embracing new labels for gender identity.
- **Cisgender:** Individuals whose gender identity matches his or her biological sex. Statistically, this is the most common gender. It would include persons who are born female who identify as female and persons born male who identify as male.

Blurring the Boundaries Between the Genders (2 of 2)

- **Transgender:** A person who identifies as or expresses a gender identity that differs from their sex at birth.
- **Intersex:** An individual possessing both male and female genitalia. Although statistically rare, this subpopulation is of great interest to gender scholars.
- Anthropological and sociological studies of gender reveal that culture, not biology, underlies gender difference.

10.2 Sociological Theories of Gender Inequalities

Functionalist Approaches

- Functionalist perspectives on gender argue that gender differences, and, specifically, men's and women's specialization in different tasks, contribute to social stability and integration.
- Scholars who support the concept of natural differences argue that women and men perform those tasks for which they are biologically best suited, in the home and outside of the home, respectively.

Critique of Functionalism

- Critics argue functionalism neglects social tensions at the expense of consensus and perpetuates a conservative view of the social world.
- Societies vary greatly in the degree to which they differentiate and assign tasks as being for men or for women.
- Feminists argue that physical differences alone cannot explain the stark gender differences in men's and women's social and economic roles.



Keystone Features/Stringer/Getty Images

Feminist Theories

- **Feminist theory:** A sociological perspective that emphasizes the centrality of gender in analyzing the social world and particularly the uniqueness of the experience of women.
- There are many strands of feminist theory, but they all share the desire to explain gender inequalities in society and to work to overcome them.

Liberal Feminism

- **Liberal feminism:** The form of feminist theory that posits that gender inequality is produced by unequal access to civil rights and certain social resources, such as education and employment, based on sex.
- Liberal feminists tend to seek solutions through changes in legislation that ensure that the rights of individuals are protected.
- Critics charge that they have been unsuccessful in dealing with the root cause of gender inequality and do not acknowledge its systemic nature.

Radical Feminism

- **Radical feminism:** The form of feminist theory that posits that gender inequality is the result of male domination in all aspects of social and economic life.
- **Patriarchy:** The dominance of men over women. All known societies are patriarchal, although there are variations in the degree and nature of the power that men exercise as compared with women.
- One of the prime objectives of women's movements in modern societies is to combat existing patriarchal institutions.



John MacDougall/AFP via Getty Images

Critique of Radical Feminism

- Radical feminists' emphasis on male violence and the objectification of women has brought these issues into the heart of mainstream debates about women's subordination.
- Critics argue that the concept of patriarchy as a universal phenomenon does not leave room for historical or cultural variations, and that their view fails to recognize that not all men have equal power to act as oppressors and not all women are equally subjugated.

Socialist Feminism

- Socialist feminism focuses on the ways that gender and social class intersect. They believe that dismantling the capitalist hierarchical system must be accompanied by eradicating gendered systems of stratification.
- Socialist feminists believe that gender is just one of several axes of oppression, and that women should work with men to fight class oppression.

Black Feminism

- **Black feminism:** A strand of feminist theory that highlights the multiple disadvantages of gender, class, and race that shape the experiences of non-White women.
- Black feminists reject the idea of a single, unified gender oppression experienced evenly by all women, and they argue that early feminist analysis reflected the specific concerns of White, middle-class women.



Lebreto Romero/The New York Times/Redux

Transnational Feminism

- **Transnational feminism:** A branch of feminist theory that highlights the way that global processes—including colonialism, racism, and imperialism—shape gender relations and hierarchies.
- Scholars working in this tradition often have a strong human rights orientation and see research as integral to social change.

Postmodern Feminism

- **Postmodern feminism:** The feminist perspective that challenges the idea of a unitary basis of identity and experience shared by all women.
- Postmodern feminists reject the claim that a grand theory can explain the position of women in society, or that there is any single, universal essence or category of “woman.”
- Instead, postmodern feminism encourages the acceptance of many different standpoints as equally valid.

Table 10.1

APPLYING SOCIOLOGY TO GENDER

CONCEPT	APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING GENDER	CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION
Social Constructionist Approaches	Gender identities are not predetermined but emerge in relation to perceived sex differences in societies and cultures, which in turn shape and even perpetuate those differences.	A husband who loses his job may refuse to do housework as a way to “do gender” and reassert his masculine identity. This places a burden on his wife and perpetuates gendered social roles.
Socialization Approaches	Gendered identities and behaviors are learned, via processes of reinforcement and imitation—similar to other forms of learning.	A young girl who likes to play football is admonished to “act more ladylike.” She may learn to stop playing in traditionally masculine sports and seek out more traditionally feminine ones.
Functionalist Approaches	Gender differences and, specifically, men’s and women’s specialization in different tasks, contribute to social stability and integration.	In the mid-twentieth century, many Americans believed it was “best” for the family and an efficient division of labor if the husband was the primary breadwinner and women were the primary caregiver.
Feminist Approaches	Everyday gender differences have their roots in men’s and women’s unequal positions in society. Social changes must focus on eradicating women’s disadvantages. Precisely how these differences can be remedied, and other intersecting sources of differences like race, are emphasized in subtypes of feminist approaches including liberal, radical, socialist, Black, transnational, and postmodernist.	Feminist social policies hold that paying men and women equally for equal work, paying women for care work, and promoting equity in the workplace and education are ways to move toward gender equality in society.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hP8dLUxBfsU>

10.3 Research on Gender Today: Documenting and Understanding Gender Inequalities

Gender Inequality

- **Gender inequality:** The inequality between men and women in terms of wealth, income, and status.
- Male dominance in a society is patriarchy. Although men are favored in almost all societies, the degree of patriarchy varies.
- In the United States, women have made tremendous progress in education, work, politics, and economics, but several forms of gender inequality persist.

Unequal Treatment in the Classroom

- Sociologists have found that schools help foster gender differences in outlook and behavior through many means, including gendered uniforms, readings, and treatment by teachers.
- Boys are overrepresented in special education programs, which can have long-term effects.
- Differences in how children are treated based on race also emerge early, intersecting with gendered treatment.

The Gendering of College Majors

- Men and women differ starkly in the majors they choose, opting for fields that are consistent with gender-typed socialization.
- The majors women choose are fields that garner the lowest earnings after graduation, whereas men are channeled into majors with high economic returns.

Gendered Inequalities in the Workplace

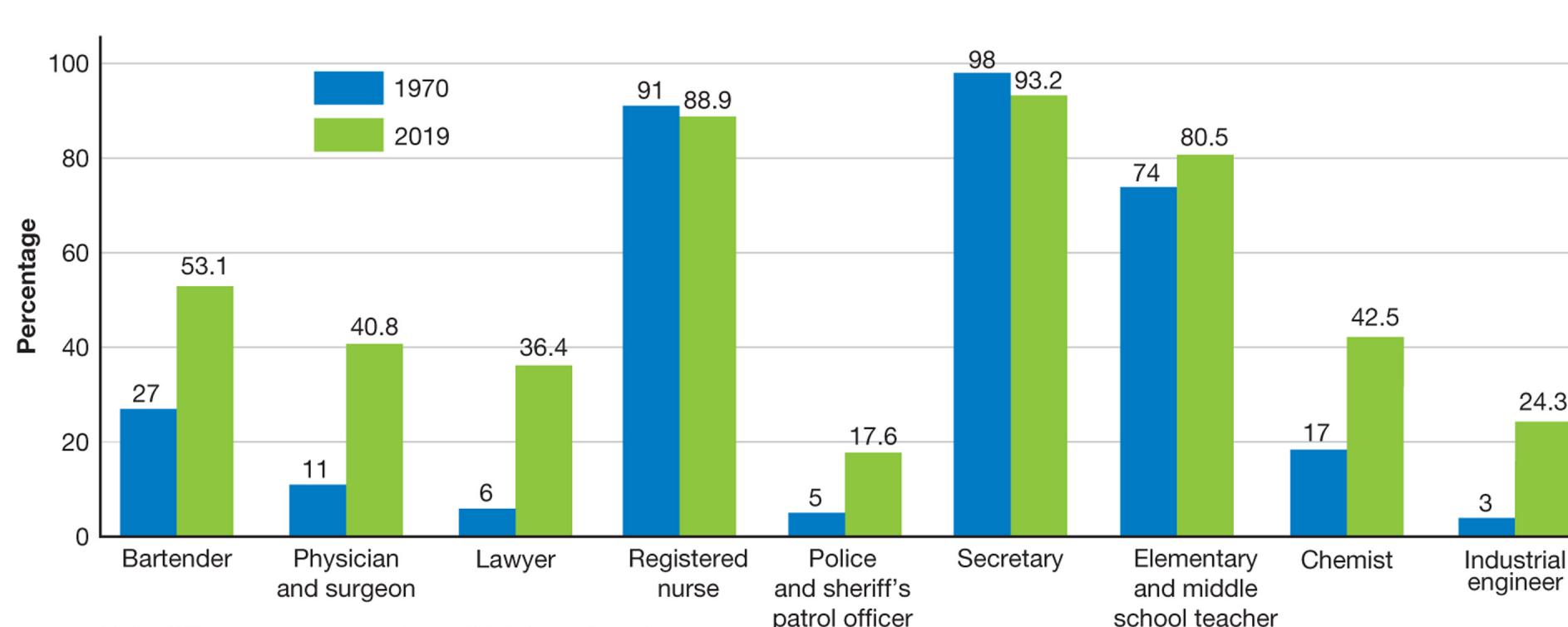
- Women's participation in the labor force has risen more or less continuously since the early twentieth century, and they currently make up roughly half of the workforce.
- During the 2008 economic downturn, 80 percent of the jobs lost were jobs held primarily by men.
- Since the 1970s, the number of married and unmarried mothers in the workforce has increased.

Occupational Segregation (1 of 2)

- **Gender typing:** Women holding occupations of lower status and pay, such as secretarial and retail positions, and men holding jobs of higher status and pay, such as managerial and professional positions.
- Once an occupation has become gender typed, inertia sets in: Job hierarchies are built around the assumption that men will occupy superior positions, while a stream of women will flow through subordinate jobs.
- Women now occupy many jobs that used to be almost exclusively male.

Occupational Segregation (2 of 2)

Figure 10.2
OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION



Note: *Women as a percentage of total employed.

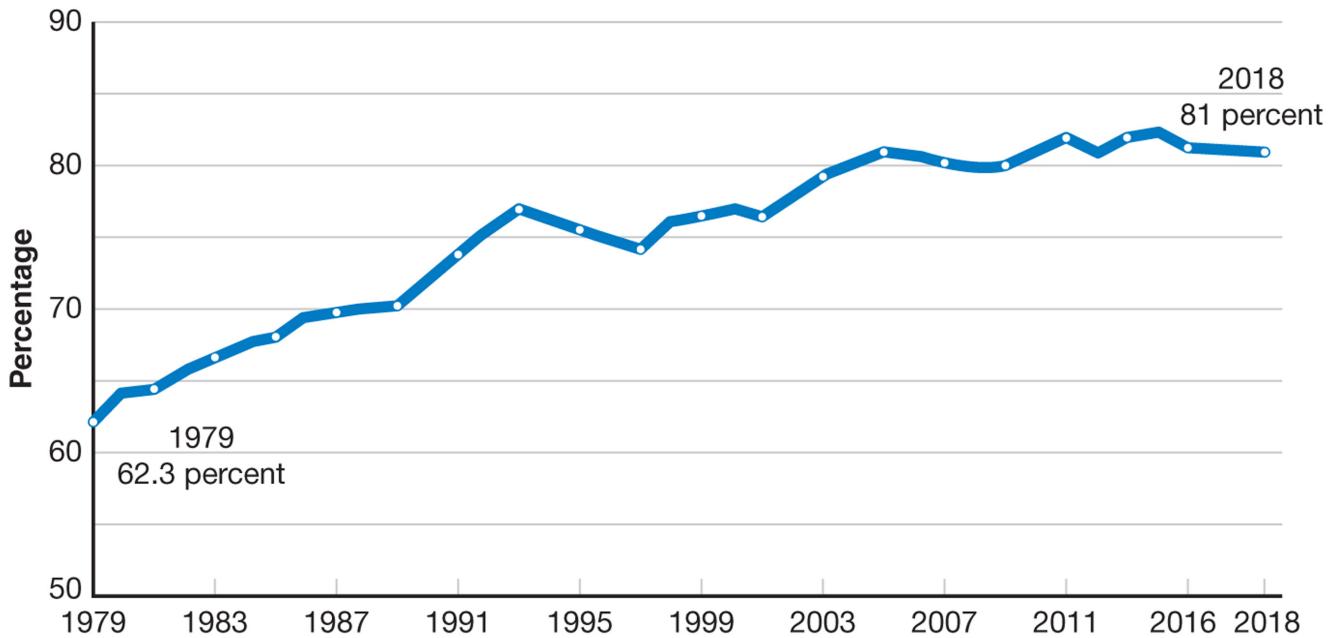
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020b.

The “Glass Ceiling”

- **Glass ceiling:** A promotion barrier that prevents a woman's upward mobility within an organization.
- White men in stable middle-class jobs in predominantly women-dominated fields may experience a “glass escalator” of promotion.
- While the gender pay gap has increased among all races and ethnic groups, it is not the same for every group: White women earned 82 percent as much as their male counterparts, compared with 89 percent for Black women, 86 percent for Hispanic women, and 76 percent for Asian women.

The Gender Pay Gap

**Figure 10.3
THE GENDER PAY GAP**



Women's earnings as a percentage of men's, for full-time wage and salary workers, 1979–2018 annual averages.

Note: Percentages are calculated from annual averages of median usual weekly earnings for fulltime wage and salary workers.

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019r.

Gender Inequities in Entrepreneurship

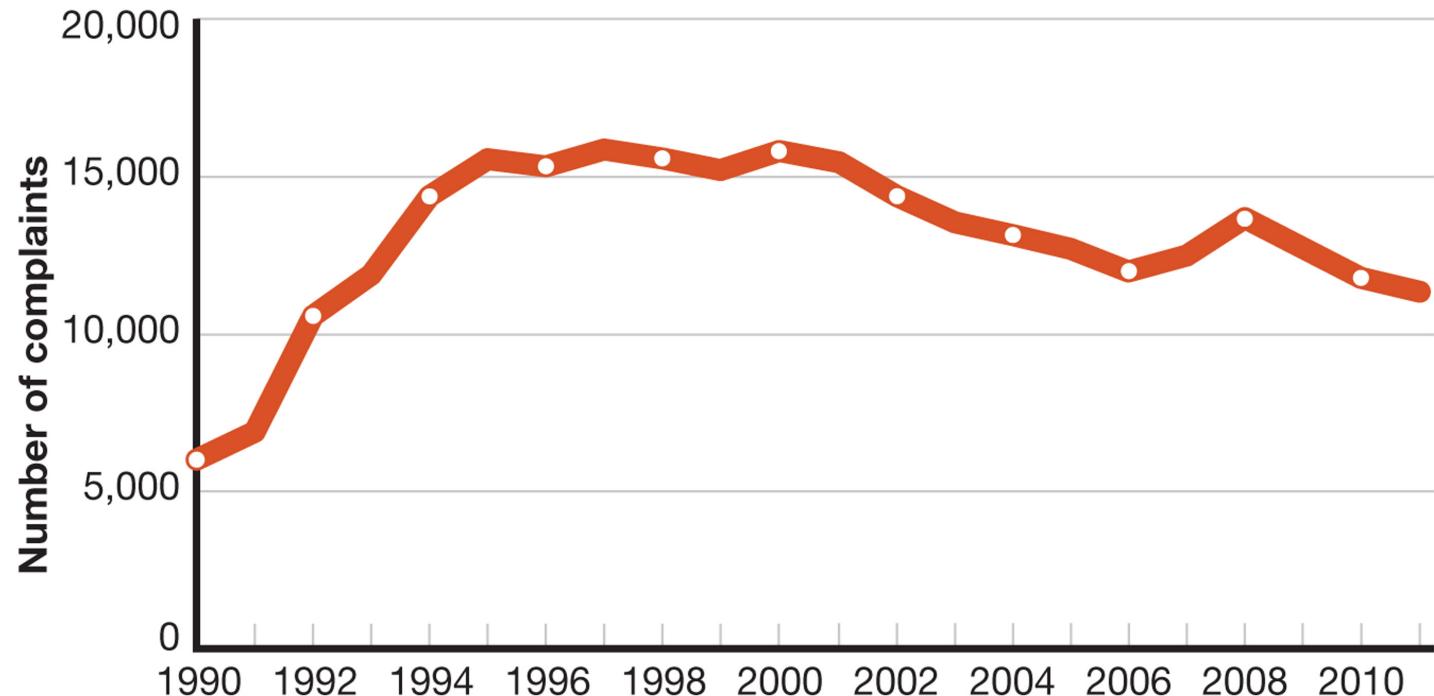
- The number of women with their own business has increased over the past several decades, though recent evidence suggests that women face greater obstacles than men when trying to secure funding.
- Sociologist Sarah Thébaud's research suggests that women-owned businesses may be under-resourced because of unfounded negative perceptions of women business owners by potential funders.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

- **Sexual harassment:** The making of unwanted sexual advances by one individual toward another, with which the first person persists even though it is clear that the other party is resistant.
- U.S. courts have defined two types of sexual harassment, quid pro quo and “hostile work environment.”
- About 12,000 sexual harassment complaints are filed each year, but most go unreported.

Sexual Harassment Complaints, 1990–2011

Figure 10.4
SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS, 1990–2011



SOURCE: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2011.

Global Gendered Inequalities in Economic Well-Being (1 of 2)

- Globally, 50 percent of women participate in the labor force, compared to 76 percent of men.
- Because women throughout the world also perform a greater share of housework and child care, women work longer hours than men in most developed countries.
- Women remain in the poorest-paying industrial and service-sector jobs in all countries.

Global Gendered Inequalities in Economic Well-Being (2 of 2)

- The feminization of the global workforce has increased the exploitation of young, uneducated, largely rural women around the world, who often labor in unsafe, unhealthy, low-paying jobs lacking job security.
- Even so, such jobs may enable some women to achieve a measure of economic independence and power.



Olli Shen/Panos Pictures

Gendered Inequalities in Families: Division of Household Labor

- Despite gradual moves toward more equal distribution, women still spend significantly more time doing housework than their male counterparts.
- Persistent gender-typed expectations in which women privilege child care and men privilege paid work have set the stage for women's economic disadvantage.
- In the coming decades, experts anticipate that we may see greater gender equity in housework and child care.

Gendered Inequality in Politics

- Women politicians are overwhelmingly affiliated with the Democratic Party.
- Typically, the more local the political office, the more likely it is to be occupied by a woman.
- Women are playing an increasingly major role in politics throughout the world, though the ratio of women to men in high-ranking positions of leadership is still low.

10.4 Unanswered Questions

The Gender Pay Gap: Why Do Women Earn Less Than Men? (1 of 2)

- **Sex segregation:** The concentration of men and women in different occupations.
- The gender composition of a job is associated with the pay received for that job, and the pay is less for jobs with a higher proportion of women.

The Gender Pay Gap: Why Do Women Earn Less Than Men? (2 of 2)

- **Human capital theory:** The argument that individuals make investments in their own “human capital” to increase their productivity and earnings.
- Feminist critics of human capital theory argue that women may not be able to freely “choose” certain occupations due to socialization and external obstacles.
- The theory also neglects power differentials between men and women. As long as women’s work remains undervalued, pay will remain low.

Increasing Gender Pay Equity: Lessons from Sweden

- In Sweden, all parents receive 480 days of paid leave to use until their child turns eight and can reduce their work hours by 25 percent.
- In the United States, only 12 percent of American employees work for companies that are eligible for even unpaid parental leave.
- Family-friendly policies like Sweden's help boost rates of employment, lifetime earnings, and returning workers to the same firm.

How Does Gender Inequality Affect Men?

- Traditional gender role beliefs and practices undermine the quality of men's relationships, their freedom to choose professions that interest them, their physical and mental health, and their life spans.
- Men are more likely than women to die of violent causes, risky and reckless behaviors, and suicide.
- The pressure on men to make sacrifices so that they can provide for their families takes a long- and short-term toll on their personal relationships.

Why Are Women So Often the Targets of Violence? (1 of 2)

- A World Health Organization study indicated that more than one-third of all women around the world have been abused in some way by intimate partners.
- **Rape:** The forcing of nonconsensual vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse.
- One in five women worldwide will be a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime.

Why Are Women So Often the Targets of Violence? (2 of 2)

- Research on male victims of rape indicate that 16 percent of men have experienced sexual assault by age 18, and gay and transgender men are particularly vulnerable.
- Many rapes go unreported.
- Most rapes are committed by relatives, partners, or acquaintances.

Why Does Violence Persist? Competing Perspectives (1 of 2)

- Some radical feminists claim that men are socialized to regard women as sex objects, which leads to a sense of male sexual entitlement and “rape culture” in which male domination fosters a state of continual fear in women.
- Female victims of sexual assault are often victimized again by judges, community members, and mass media that hold women “responsible” for their sexual victimization.

Why Does Violence Persist? Competing Perspectives (2 of 2)

- Rape has long been used as an instrument of war to dehumanize the victims, break apart families, and weaken the resolve of victims to resist their aggressors.
- The intersections of race, class, sexual orientation, and immigrant status may render a person more or less vulnerable to gender-based mistreatment.