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CHAPTER 4

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Gender and Family

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What Do YOU Think?

Are the following statements **TRUE** or **FALSE?**
You may be surprised by the answers (see answer key on the following page.)

T F 1 Gender roles reflect the instinctive nature of males and females.

T F 2 Gender roles are influenced by ethnicity.

T F 3 The only universal feature of gender is that all societies sort people into only two categories.

T F 4 Parents are not always aware that they treat their sons and daughters differently.

T F 5 Peers are the most important influence on gender-role development from adolescence through old age.

T F 6 Both boys and girls suffer from gender-related problems in school.

T F 7 For African Americans, the traditional female gender role includes both employment and motherhood.

T F 8 Research shows it is possible for women and men to establish work or family roles that are counter to their socialization.

T F 9 Compared with traditional roles, contemporary male gender roles place more emphasis on the expectation that men will be actively involved with their children.

T F 10 Men's and women's movements have consistently stressed the importance of family.

Did you ever stop to consider how similar or different your life might be if you had been born the opposite sex? Would you be the kind of person you are? Participate in the same activities? Have the same friends? Have the same roles and relationships within your families? Would your goals be the same as they are now? Would you be enrolled in the same college? Take the same courses? Be reading this book? What about your expectations for relationships? Would you envision the same familial future? Asking ourselves such questions reminds us that much of what we do, who we are, what we expect, and what happens to us is influenced by gender. In this chapter we examine how deeply interconnected family experience is with gender. It is no exaggeration to say that we cannot fully understand one without taking the other into account.

The traditional view of gender depicts male and female, masculinity and femininity, men and women as polar opposites. Our gender stereotypes fit this pattern of polar differences: we believe that if men are aggressive, women are passive; if men are instrumental (task oriented), women are expressive (emotion oriented); if men are rational, women must be irrational; if men want sex, women want love (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Lips 1997).

As shown in this chapter, this *perception* of male–female differences is greater than the actual differences (Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1990b). We may be accustomed to thinking that we are as different as Martians would be from Venusians, but both women and men inhabit Earth (Kimmel 2000). At the same time, our family experience *is* highly "gendered" (that is, differently experienced for women and men). Marriages might be said to consist of "two marriages, his and hers," that are not entirely the same (Bernard 1982). Similarly, we could argue that there are "two courtships," "two parenthoods," "two divorces," and so on. In each area of marriage and family life, we often observe differences in what women and men experience. Some data suggest that men and women may define and experience love differently, enter marriage with different emphases and expectations, react to the onset of parenthood and relate to their children differently, divorce for different reasons and with different consequences, and so on. The chapters that follow identify and illustrate some of these gender differences.

In this chapter we examine some gender and socialization theories and illustrate how much our families influence how we learn to act masculine and feminine. Next, we explore some areas of family experience that have been and remain differently experienced by women and men. Finally, we discuss changing gender roles and consider some gender-based social movements of the past 5 decades.

Answer Key for What Do You Think

1 False, see p. 119; 2 True, see p. 127; 3 False, see p. 117; 4 True, see p. 124; 5 False, see p. 129; 6 True, see p. 128; 7 True, see p. 128; 8 True, see p. 131; 9 True, see p. 131; 10 False, see p. 144.

Understanding Gender and Gender Roles

Studying Gender

Before we commence, we need to define several key terms useful in building an understanding of the importance of gender in family life. These terms include *sex, role, gender role, gender-role stereotype, gender-role attitude,* and *gender-role behavior.* **Sex** refers here to the biological aspect of being male or female. As such, it includes chromosomal, hormonal, and anatomical characteristics that differentiate females from males. In general, a **role** consists of culturally defined expectations that an individual is expected to fulfill in a given situation in a particular culture. A **gender role** is a role that a person is expected to perform as a result of being male or female in a particular culture. (The term *gender role* is a more recent concept that has largely replaced the traditional term *sex role.*) A **gender-role stereotype** is a rigidly held and oversimplified belief that all males and females, as a result of their sex, possess distinct psychological and behavioral traits. Stereotypes tend to be false not only for the group but also for any individual member of the group. Even if the generalization is statistically valid in describing a group average, such as males are taller than females, we cannot necessarily predict whether Jason will be taller than Tanya. **Gender-role attitude** refers to the beliefs we have regarding appropriate male and female personality traits and activities. **Gender-role behavior** refers to the actual activities or behaviors we engage in as males and females. When we discuss

gender roles, it is important not to confuse stereotypes with reality or to confuse attitudes with behavior.

Historically, most gender-role studies focused on the Caucasian middle class. This made it difficult to know whether and how gender roles may have differed among African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other ethnic groups. Students and researchers must be just as careful not to project onto other groups the gender-role concepts or aspirations characteristic of their own groups. Too often such projections can lead to distortions or moral judgments. Although we may come to accept one particular standard of behavior as more "appropriate" masculinity or femininity, there are actually **multiple masculinities and femininities,** out of which emerges a version that is expected or accepted (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2000; Messerschmidt 1993).

These dominant or **hegemonic models of gender** are held up as the standards for all women and men to emulate (Kimmel 2000). They are also dynamic and culturally variable. They change over time (Kimmel 1996), differ across space (Gilmore 1990), and—within a given time and place—are challenged for cultural dominance by those who advocate other versions of masculinity or femininity (Kimmel 1994; Connell 1995).

Gender and Gender Roles

Gender is simultaneously experienced on both personal and political levels. At birth, we are identified as either male or female. This identification, based essentially on inspection of genitalia, typically leads to the self-identity or **gender identity** we form of ourselves as females or males. We say "typically" because there are individuals who for a combination of reasons are categorized as *transsexuals*—males and females who develop self-identities that differ from the gender category into which they have been placed. They opt for reconstructive surgery to bring their biology into line with the identity they have developed, seeking "to become—physically, socially and legally—the sex they have always been psychologically. If they succeed in doing so, they typically consider themselves simply as members of their new sex, rejecting any significance to how they arrived there" (Coombs 1997).

Increasingly, we see the term *transgenderism* being used to refer to a range of situations in which a person's gender identity or gender presentation (whether individuals present themselves as a male or as a female) do not match what would be expected by wider society for someone with the anatomical characteristics she or he possesses. This would include cross-dressers (transvestites), transsexuals, non-operative transsexuals (individuals who identify as opposite their biological sex but do not seek to undergo sex reassignment surgery), and individuals Mary Coombs refers to as "bigendered," the gender equivalent of bisexuals, who choose at times to present themselves as male and at other times as female (Coombs 1997).

We acquire our gender identities at a young age. Furthermore, gender identity may well be the deepest concept we hold of ourselves. The psychology of insults reveals this depth; few things offend a person, especially a male, as much as to be tauntingly characterized as a member of the "opposite" sex. Gender identity determines many of the directions our lives will take—for example, whether we will fulfill the role of husband or wife, father or mother. When the scripts are handed out in life, the one you receive depends largely on your gender.

At the same time that it denotes how we perceive ourselves, gender is a basis for the assignment of social roles, the distribution of rewards, and the exercise of power. Most societies are **patriarchal societies,** in which males dominate political and economic institutions and exercise power in interpersonal relationships. Although many societies have been identified as more **egalitarian** (in which women and men enjoy similar amounts of power and neither dominates the economic or political institutions), truly **matriarchal societies** have not been evident. Within patriarchal societies, families tend to be male dominated. That is to say, in daily decision making and the division of responsibilities, men have privileges that women do not (for example, freedom from domestic work). The familial power that men have stems from various sources, including the marriage contract and their wage-earning roles. Later chapters explore in more detail how gender and power are connected within households and families.

Each culture determines the content of gender roles in its own way. In some cultures, there are more than two gender categories. Among some Asian and Native American societies, for example, men or women become *berdaches.* They then live as members of the opposite sex. The Hua of Papua, New Guinea, perceive gender as fluid, capable of changing over the individual's life span. In other societies, alternative categories (for example, the Hjira of India) are socially recognized for individuals who are *neither* male nor female (Renzetti and Curran 1999; Nanda 1990).

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Generally, the only limit on the jobs that women or men hold is social custom, not biology or individual ability. Even sex-segregated jobs such as nursing and firefighting can be performed by either gender.

We can identify less extreme cultural variations in conceptualizations of gender. Among the Arapesh of New Guinea, both males and females possess what we consider feminine traits. Men and women alike tend to be passive, cooperative, peaceful, and nurturing. The father is said to "bear a child," as well as the mother; only the father's continual care can make a child grow healthily, both in the womb and in childhood. Eighty miles away, the Mundugumor live in remarkable contrast to the peaceful Arapesh. Margaret Mead (1975) offered this observation:

> Both men and women are expected to be violent, competitive, aggressively sexed, jealous, and ready to see and avenge insult, delighting in display, in action, in fighting. . . . Many, if not all, of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of headdress that a society at a given period assigned to either sex.

Biology creates males and females, but culture creates masculinity and femininity.

Masculinity and Femininity: Opposites or Similar?

Until the last generation, a **bipolar gender role** was the dominant model used to explain male–female differences. In this model, males and females are seen as polar opposites, with males possessing exclusively instrumental traits and females possessing exclusively expressive ones. Sandra Bem (1993) describes the culture of the United States as one that looks at gender through a series of "lenses," including the belief that

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males and females are fundamentally different. She calls this assumption *gender polarization.* Our entire society is organized around such supposed differences (Renzetti and Curran 2003). In light of the widespread acceptance of this viewpoint and its immense popularization through John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus,* Michael Kimmel (2000) cleverly calls this viewpoint the "interplanetary theory of gender."

Traditional views of masculinity and femininity as opposites have several implications. First, if a person differs from the male or female stereotype, he or she is seen as being more like the other gender. If a woman is sexually assertive, for example, she is not only less feminine but also is believed to be more masculine. Similarly, if a man is nurturing, he is not only less masculine but also is seen as more feminine. Second, because males and females are perceived as opposites, they cannot share the same traits or qualities. A "real man" possesses exclusively masculine traits and behaviors, and a "real woman" possesses exclusively feminine traits and behaviors. A man is assertive, and a woman is receptive; in reality, both men and women are often both assertive and receptive. Third, because males and females are viewed as opposites, they are believed to have little in common with each other, and a "war of the sexes" is alleged as the norm. Men and women can't understand each other, nor can they expect to do so. Difficulties in their relationships are attributed to their "oppositeness."

The fundamental problem with the view of men and women as opposites is that it is erroneous. As men and women we are significantly more alike than we are different.

Our culture, however, has encouraged us to look for differences and, when we find them, to exaggerate their degree and significance. It has taught us to ignore the most important fact about males and females: that we are both human. As humans, we are significantly more alike biologically and psychologically than we are different. As men and women, we share similar respiratory, circulatory, neurological, skeletal, and muscular systems. (Even the penis and the clitoris evolved from the same undifferentiated embryonic structure.) Hormonally, both men and women produce androgens and estrogen (but in different amounts). Where men and women biologically differ most significantly is in terms of their reproductive functions: men impregnate, whereas women menstruate, gestate, and nurse. Beyond these reproductive differences, biological differences are not great. In terms of social behavior, studies suggest that men are more aggressive both physically and verbally than women; the gender difference, however, is not large. Most differences can be traced to gender-role expectations, male–female status, and gender stereotyping.

Matter of Fact

Recent reviews of literature concerning gender find that *neither* men *nor* women are more likely to dominate, are more susceptible to influence, or are more nurturing, altruistic, or empathetic (Lips 1997).

Although we are more similar than different in our attributes and abilities, large and meaningful differences do exist in the *statuses* (or positions in various groups and organizations) we occupy and the privileges and responsibilities these carry. Although either gender may have the *ability* to nurture children, support families, clean, or cook, these tasks are assumed to be more appropriate for one gender than the other. Although women and men may possess the *ability* to do many kinds of jobs, the labor force is sex-segregated into jobs that are disproportionately male or female. Men's jobs typically carry more prestige, earn higher salaries, and offer more opportunity for advancement than do women's jobs.

We often refer to these differences as "gaps." The "wage gap" refers to the difference between what men tend to earn and what women tend to earn. Recent data indicate that when we compare the median weekly earnings of women and men employed full-time, women earn 75.7% of what men earn. As Table 4.1 shows, in 2003 white women earned 75.6% of what white men earned.

We can also speak of "prestige gaps" or "mobility gaps." Jobs that tend to be among the most highly respected jobs (typically, jobs such as physician, attorney, and engineer) tend to be held disproportionately by men. Jobs held largely by women (such as types of clerical work, elementary and preschool teaching, household service, and nursing) are often undervalued (and, not surprisingly, underpaid). We should not assume that "men's jobs" are highly paid and highly respected and "women's jobs" are devalued and underpaid. Instead, the point is that in those jobs rewarded with higher levels of prestige and higher salaries, we tend to find more men than women. Finally, compared to jobs in which we find mostly men, jobs typically held by women may offer only limited

Table 4.1 ■ The Wage Gap by Gender and Race

Median annual earnings of black men and women, Hispanic men and women, and white women as a percentage of white men's median annual earnings.

Year	White men	Black men	Hispanic men	White women	Black women	Hispanic women
1970	100%	69.0%	NA	58.7%	48.2%	NA
1975	100	74.3	72.1	57.5	55.4	49.3
1980	100	70.7	70.8	58.9	55.7	50.5
1985	100	69.7	68.0	63.0	57.1	52.1
1990	100	73.1	66.3	69.4	62.5	54.3
1992	100	72.6	63.3	70.0	64.0	55.4
1994	100	75.1	64.3	71.6	63.0	55.6
1995	100	75.9	63.3	71.2	64.2	53.4
1996	100	80.0	63.9	73.3	65.1	56.6
1997	100	75.1	61.4	71.9	62.6	53.9
1998	100	74.9	61.6	72.6	62.6	53.1
1999	100	80.6	61.6	71.6	65.0	52.1
2000	100	78.2	63.4	72.2	64.6	52.8
2003	100	78.2	63.3	75.6	65.4	54.3

SOURCE: National Committee on Pay Equity, http://www.infoplease.com.
NA means data not available.

levels of upward mobility (movement "up" in income and position). Cumulatively, we may refer to these economic gaps and inequalities as indicators of *gender stratification,* a term that denotes that in economic, as well as many social and political, ways, men are "on top" in society. This is similar to the way that the upper and middle classes are "above" the working and lower classes. Although women are not literally beneath men, on average they earn less and wield less political power. In the "gender hierarchy," men are superordinates and women subordinates (Goode 1980).

Despite possessing traits of both genders, most of us feel either masculine or feminine; we usually do not doubt our gender (Heilbrun 1982). Unfortunately, when people believe that individuals should *not* have the attributes culturally identified or associated with the other gender, females suppress their **instrumental traits** (perceived as their "masculine side") and, to an even greater extent, males suppress their **expressive traits** (perceived as their "feminine side"). As a result, the range of possible human behaviors is further reduced and limited by expectations attached to gender roles. As psychologist Sandra Bem (1975) pointed out more than 30 years ago, "Our current system of sex role differentiation has long since outlived its usefulness, and . . . now serves only to prevent both men and women from developing as full and complete human beings."

When we initially meet a person, we unconsciously note whether the individual is male or female (a process called *gender attribution*) and respond accordingly (Skitka and Maslach 1990). But what happens if we cannot immediately classify a person as male or female? Many of us feel uncomfortable because we don't know how to act if we don't know the gender. This is true even if gender is irrelevant, as in a bank transaction, walking past someone on the street, or answering a query about the time. ("Was that a man or woman?" a person may ask in exasperation, although it really makes no difference.) An inability to tell a person's gender may provoke a hostile response. As Hilary Lips (1997) writes:

> It is unnerving to be unsure of the sex of the person on the other end of the conversation. The labels *female* and *male* carry powerful associations about what to expect from the person to whom they are applied. We use the information the labels provide to guide our behavior toward other people and to interpret their behavior toward us.

Our need to classify people as male or female and its significance is demonstrated in the well-known Baby X experiment (Condry and Condry 1976). In this experiment, three groups played with an infant known as Baby X. The first group was told that the baby was a girl, the second group was told that the baby was a

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boy, and the third group was not told what gender the baby was. The group that did not know what gender Baby X was felt extremely uncomfortable, but the group participants then made a decision based on whether the baby was "strong" or "soft." When the baby was labeled a boy, its fussing behavior was called "angry"; when the baby was labeled a girl, the same behavior was called "frustrated." Once the baby's gender was determined (whether correctly or not), a train of responses followed that could have profound consequences in his or her socialization. The study was replicated numerous times with the same general results. Even birth congratulations cards reflect gender stereotyping of newborns (Bridges 1993).

A review of studies on infant labeling found that gender stereotyping is strongest among children, adolescents, and college students (Stern and Karraker 1989). Stereotyping diminishes among adults, especially among infants' mothers (Vogel et al. 1991).

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Often we assume that the way an individual acts out his or her gender *(gender display* or *presentation)* is a sign of their **sexual orientation,** or the nature of someone's sexual preference, be it for partners of the same or opposite sex or both. In other words, we link characteristics of gender with assumptions of sexual preference. Although we often dichotomize sexual preference into a duality of homosexuality and heterosexuality, the universe of sexual orientation is more diverse and wide ranging (encompassing bisexuality and situational sexuality). We need to sever this almost automatic assumption. We assume that women who depart from the variety of behavioral norms associated with femininity and female roles must be lesbians; we assume that men who depart from masculinity and reject male roles ("feminine" men) must be gay men. Neither is true. Sexual preference cannot be "read" by demeanor or role behavior. Men who fit within norms of "masculine behavior" may be heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual. Men whose behavior seems "feminine" by wider cultural standards may be gay, bisexual, or heterosexual. The same holds true for women.

On a second level, we often make connections between gender and sexual orientation by raising doubts and suspicions about the sexual orientation of those who depart from gender expectations. In this way, gender norms are bolstered and reinforced. Men, especially, may monitor and restrict their behavior so as to avoid the disparaging and unwanted sort of question, "What are you anyway, a fag?" These potential doubts accomplish the feat of keeping people conforming to gender roles and expectations.

In various ways, gender transcends sexual orientation. There are similarities that exist between heterosexual and gay men (for example, in areas like acceptance of nonmonogamous relationships) because they are men (for example, men typically are more tolerant of and interested in infidelity than are women).

Gender and Gender Socialization

There are several prominent theories used to explain the significance of gender in our culture and how we learn what is expected of us. These include gender theory, social learning theory, and cognitive development theory.

Gender Theory

In studying gender, feminist scholars begin with two assumptions: (1) that male–female relationships are characterized by power issues and (2) that society is constructed in such a way that males dominate females. They argue that on every level, male–female relationships—whether personal, familial, or societal—reflect and encourage male dominance, putting females at a disadvantage. Male dominance is neither natural nor inevitable, however. Instead, it is created by social institutions, such as religious groups, government, and the family (Acker 1993; Ferree 1991). The question is: How is male–female inequality created?

Social Construction of Gender

In the 1980s, gender theory emerged as an important model explaining inequality. According to this theory, gender is a **social construct,** an idea or concept created by society through the use of social power. **Gender theory** asserts that society may be best understood by how it is organized according to gender and that social relationships are based on the *socially perceived*

differences between females and males that are used to justify unequal power relationships (Scott 1986; White 1993). Imagine, for example, an infant crying in the night. In the mother–father parenting relationship, which parent gets up to take care of the baby? In most cases, the mother does because women are socially perceived to be nurturing and it's the woman's "responsibility" as mother (even if she hasn't slept in two nights and is employed full-time).

Gender theory focuses on (1) how specific behaviors (such as nurturing or aggression) or roles (such as childrearer, truck driver, or secretary) are defined as male or female; (2) how labor is divided into man's work and woman's work, both at home and in the workplace; and (3) how different institutions bestow advantages on men (such as male-only clergy in many religious denominations or women receiving less pay than men for the same work).

Central to the creation of gender inequality are the belief that men and women are fundamentally different and the fact that the differences between the genders—in personalities, abilities, skills, and traits—are unequally valued: reason and aggression (defined as male traits) are considered more valuable than sensitivity and compliance (defined as female traits). Making men and women appear to be opposite and of unequal value requires the suppression of natural similarities by the use of social power. The exercise of social power might take the form of greater societal value being placed on looks than on achievement for women, of sexual harassment of women in the workplace or university, of patronizing attitudes toward women, and so on.

"Doing Gender"

Some gender scholars emphasize the situational nature of gender: how it is reproduced or constructed in everyday social encounters. They argue that more than what we *are,* gender is something that we *do* (West and Zimmerman 1987; Risman 1998). As Greer Fox and Velma Murry (2000) explain it, "men and women not only vary in their degree of masculinity or femininity but have to be constantly persuaded or reminded to be masculine and feminine. That is, men and women have to 'do' gender rather than 'be' a gender."

We "do gender" whenever we take into account the gendered expectations in social situations and act accordingly. We don't so much perform an internalized role as tailor our behaviors to convey our suitability as a woman or a man in the particular situation in which we find ourselves (West and Zimmerman 1987). To fail to conform to the expectations for someone of our gender in a given situation exposes us to potential criticism, ridicule, or rejection as an incompetent or immoral man or woman (Risman 1998). But in living up to or within those social expectations, we help create and sustain the idea of gender difference. According to Michael Kimmel (2000, 104), "successfully being a man or a woman simply means convincing others that you are what you appear to be."

Although we see the social construction or "doing" of gender in all kinds of social settings, the family is a particularly gendered domain (Risman 1998). There are cultural expectations about how wage earning, housework, childcare, and sexual intimacy should be allocated and performed between women and men. Thus, much of the experience that people have in their families is understandable as both an exercise in and a consequence of how they and others "do gender."

Gender as Social Structure

Another key idea shared by many gender theorists is the notion that gender is a social structure that constrains behavior by the opportunities it offers or denies us (Risman 1987, 1998; Lorber 1994; Connell 1987). The consequences of the different opportunities afforded women and men can be seen at the *individual* level in the development of gendered selves, at the *interactional* level in the cultural expectations and situational meanings that shape how we "do gender," and at the *institutional* level in such things as sex-segregated jobs, a wage gap, and other economic and institutional realities that differentiate women's and men's experiences (Risman 1998). Although we may more often focus on individuals making choices that reflect their internalization of gender expectations, situations and institutions also shape behavior.

Gender Socialization through Social Learning Theory

Many theorists see gender like any other socially acquired role. They stress that we have to be socialized to act according to the expectations attached to our status as female or male. The emphasis on socialization has been considerable, although consensus on the process of socialization has not. In other words, there is considerable agreement that we undergo gender

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socialization, but there are different theories of how such socialization proceeds. **Social learning theory** is derived from behaviorist psychology and its emphasis on observable events and their consequences rather than internal feelings and drives. According to behaviorists, we learn attitudes and behaviors as a result of social interactions with others (hence, the term *social learning*).

The cornerstone of social learning theory is the belief that consequences control behavior. Acts regularly followed by a reward are likely to occur again; acts regularly punished are less likely to recur. Girls are rewarded for playing with dolls ("What a nice mommy!"), but boys are not ("What a sissy!").

This behaviorist approach has been modified recently to include **cognition**—that is, mental processes (such as evaluation and reflection) that intervene between stimulus and response. The cognitive processes involved in social learning include our ability to use language, anticipate consequences, and make observations. These cognitive processes are important in learning gender roles. By using language, we can tell our daughter that we like it when she does well in school and that we don't like it when she hits someone. A person's ability to anticipate consequences affects behavior. A boy does not need to wear lace stockings in public to know that such dressing will lead to negative consequences. Finally, children observe what others do. A girl may learn that she "shouldn't" play video games by seeing that the players in video arcades are mostly boys.

We also learn gender roles by imitation, according to social learning theory. Learning through imitation is called **modeling.** Most of us are not even aware of the many subtle behaviors that make up gender roles—the ways in which men and women use different mannerisms and gestures, speak differently, and so on. We don't "teach" these behaviors by reinforcement. Children tend to model friendly, warm, and nurturing adults; they also tend to imitate adults who are powerful in their eyes—that is, adults who control access to food, toys, or privileges. Initially, the most powerful models that children have are their parents. Reflecting on your own family, you might examine the division of labor in your household. How is housework divided? How is unpaid household work valued in comparison with employment in the workplace?

As children grow older and their social world expands, so do the number of people who may act as their role models: siblings, friends, teachers, media figures, and so on. Children sift through the various demands and expectations associated with the different models to create their unique selves.

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Playing "dress up" is one way children model the characteristics and behaviors of adults. It is part of the process of learning what is appropriate for someone of their gender.

Cognitive Development Theory

In contrast to social learning theory, **cognitive development theory** focuses on the child's active interpretation of the messages he or she receives from the environment. Whereas social learning theory assumes that children and adults learn in fundamentally the same way, cognitive development theory stresses that we learn differently, depending on our age. Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) showed that children's abilities to reason and understand change as they grow older.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) took Piaget's findings and applied them to how children assimilate gender-role information at different ages. At age 2, children can correctly identify themselves and others as boys or girls, but they tend to base this identification on superficial features, such as hair and clothing. Girls have long hair and wear dresses; boys have short hair and never wear dresses. Some children even believe they can change their sex by changing their clothes or hair length. They don't identify sex in terms of genitalia, as older children and adults do. No amount of reinforcement will alter their views because their ideas are limited by their developmental stage.

When children are 6 or 7 years old and capable of grasping the idea that basic characteristics do not change, they begin to understand that gender is permanent. A woman can be a woman even if she has short hair and wears pants. Oddly enough, although children can understand the permanence of sex, they tend to insist on rigid adherence to gender-role stereotypes. Even though boys can play with dolls, children of both sexes believe they shouldn't because "dolls are for girls." Researchers speculate that children exaggerate gender roles to make the roles "cognitively clear."

According to social learning theory, children learn appropriate gender-role behavior through reinforcement and modeling. But according to cognitive development theory, once children learn that gender is permanent, they independently strive to act like "proper" girls or boys. They do this on their own because of an internal need for congruence, the agreement between what they know and how they act. Also, children find that performing the appropriate gender-role activities is rewarding. Models and reinforcement help show them how well they are doing, but the primary motivation is internal.

How Family Matters: Learning Gender Roles

Although biological factors, such as hormones, clearly are involved in the development of male and female differences, the extent of biological influences is not well understood. Moreover, it is difficult to analyze the relationship between biology and behavior because learning begins at birth. In this section, we explore gender-role learning from infancy through adulthood, emphasizing the influence of our families in the construction of our ideas about gender.

Childhood and Adolescence

In our culture, infant girls are usually held more gently and treated more tenderly than boys, who are ordinarily subjected to rougher forms of play. As early as the first day after birth, parents tend to describe their daughters as soft, fine featured, and small and their sons as hard, large featured, big, and attentive. Fathers tend to stereotype their sons more extremely than mothers do (Fagot and Leinbach 1987). Although it is impossible for strangers to know the gender of a diapered baby, once they learn the baby's gender, they respond accordingly. Such gender-role socialization occurs throughout our lives. By middle childhood, although conforming to gender-role behavior and attitudes becomes increasingly important, there is still considerable flexibility (Absi-Semaan, Crombie, and Freeman 1993). It is not until late childhood and adolescence that conformity becomes most characteristic. The primary agents forming our gender roles are parents. Eventually, teachers, peers, and the media also play important roles.

Parents as Socialization Agents

During infancy and early childhood, a child's most important source of learning is the primary caretaker—often both parents, but also often just the mother, father, grandmother, or someone else. Most parents may not be aware of how much their words and actions contribute to their children's gender-role socialization (Culp et al. 1983). Nor are they aware that they treat their sons and daughters differently because of their gender. Although parents may recognize that they

respond differently to sons than to daughters, they usually have a ready explanation—the “natural” differences in the temperament and behavior of girls and boys. Parents may also believe that they adjust their responses to each particular child’s personality. In an everyday living situation that involves changing diapers, feeding babies, stopping fights, and providing entertainment, it may be difficult for harassed parents to recognize that their own actions may be largely responsible for the differences they attribute to nature.

The role of nature cannot be ignored completely, however. Temperamental characteristics may be present at birth. Also, many parents who have conscientiously tried to raise their children in a nonsexist way have been frustrated to find their toddler sons shooting each other with carrots or their daughters primping in front of the mirror. Indeed, it is increasingly likely that some gender differences are influenced by hormones and/or chromosomes. At the same time, it is undeniable that children are socialized differently based on their gender.

Childhood gender socialization occurs in many ways. Children’s literature, for example, typically depicts girls as passive and dependent, whereas boys are instrumental and assertive (Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993). In the more than 4,000 children’s books published annually, females are rarely portrayed as brave or independent and are typically presented in supporting roles (Renzetti and Curran 2003). Children’s toys and clothing also reinforce gender differences. In general, children are socialized by their parents through four subtle processes: manipulation, channeling, verbal appellation, and activity exposure (Oakley 1985):

- *Manipulation.* From infancy onward parents treat daughters more gently (telling them how beautiful they are, advising them that nice girls do not fight,

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Generally, daughters are given more responsibilities than are sons.

Exploring Diversity The Work Daughters Do to Help Families Survive

Listen as two of the teenage girls Lisa Dodson and Jillian Dickert studied describe their contributions to their families.

> I have to take care of the house and take care of the kids and I don't go outside. I have to stay home. They have to work and so I take over.
>
> 15-year-old Ella
>
> I have to clean up the kitchen in the morning before school and then do whatever shopping or whatever on the way home. I cook for the kids (younger sister and cousin) before I start my (home)work.
>
> 16-year-old Anita

Ella and Anita carry heavy family responsibilities. Think back to your own childhood and adolescence. Because of a tendency to focus either on middle-class families or on younger children, the importance of children's contributions to household labor has been minimized and misunderstood (Gager, Cooney, and Call 1999). In many families, however, especially low-income or single-parent families, the contributions made by the children, particularly daughters, become part of a "survival strategy" without which their families would suffer greatly (Dodson and Dickert 2004).

Although both sons and daughters often contribute labor to the household, what they do, how much they do, and the consequences of their labor—both for themselves and for their families—greatly differ (Gager, Cooney, and Call 1999). Using data on 825 high school students who were part of the larger Youth Development Study, researchers Constance Gager, Teresa Cooney, and Kathleen Thiede Call compared the household labor of sons and daughters when they were in ninth and later twelfth grade. Among their findings were the following:

- As ninth graders, boys spent only 87% as much time as girls in housework. By twelfth grade, boys spent only 68% as much time as girls. They also differed in what tasks they were involved in.
- In ninth grade, girls averaged more than 2 hours per week in household tasks beyond the time boys spent on average (17 hours for girls to nearly 15 hours for boys). As twelfth graders, the gap had practically doubled (13 hours to 9 hours).
- Boys spent more time than girls on "male tasks." However, fewer household tasks are predominantly male. Such tasks—doing yard work, shoveling snow, and taking out the trash—tend to be less repetitive than stereotypical female tasks. These were the only tasks boys reported doing more often than girls. Female tasks included cooking, setting the table, washing dishes, doing laundry, cleaning, shopping for groceries, and caring for other family members.
- Twelfth graders living with single parents devoted the most time to housework—3 hours more per week than children living with both biological parents.
- On top of doing greater amounts of housework, girls devoted more time to homework, paid work, and volunteering than boys did, result-

and so on) and sons more roughly (telling them how strong they are, advising them not to cry, and so on). Eventually, children incorporate such views as integral parts of their personalities. Differences in girls' and boys' behaviors may result from parents expecting their children to behave differently (Connors 1996, cited in Renzetti and Curran 2003).

- *Channeling.* Children are directed toward specific objects and activities and away from others. Toys, for example, are differentiated by gender and are marketed with gender themes, as can be seen in toy ads and displays in retail stores. Parents purchase different toys for their daughters and sons, who—influenced by advertising, the reinforcement by their parents, and the enthusiasm of their peers—are attracted to gendered toys (Renzetti and Curran 2003).
- *Verbal appellation.* Parents use different words with boys and with girls to describe the same behavior. A boy who pushes others may be described as "active," whereas a girl who does the same may be called "aggressive."
- *Activity exposure.* Both genders are usually exposed to feminine activities early in life, but boys are discouraged from imitating their mothers, whereas girls are encouraged to be "mother's little helpers." Chores are categorized by gender (Gager, Cooney, and Call 1999; Dodson and Dickert 2004). Boys' domestic chores take them outside the house, whereas girls' chores keep them in it—another rehearsal for traditional adult life.

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ing in an adolescent version of a leisure gap between the genders.

- Summing up their findings, Gager, Cooney, and Call report, "when we consider all household tasks, teenage girls are more likely to pick up the slack when the need arises."

Daughters' contributions to their households become even more evident in the research reported by Dodson and Dickert (2004). Girls like Ella and Anita are not merely helping out; they are indispensable ingredients in their families' survival. Dodson and Dickert specifically note the ways teenage daughters in low-income families take responsibility for household tasks, including caring for younger siblings, freeing their frequently single and employed mothers from either additional and burdensome childcare costs or reduced income (from having to miss work or cut back hours). Driven by economic necessity, low-income parents, especially single mothers, are pushed to depend on their daughters to do what they, themselves, are unavailable to do. This includes caregiving and domestic work. In caring for younger siblings, girls may feed and wash them, help them with schoolwork, monitor their activities, and put them to bed. Household chores might include cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, and even household maintenance. In short, daughters do what mothers are unable to do, either because of employment-induced absence (entering the labor force, working increased hours, or commuting greater distances) or familial circumstance (birth, adoption, maternal illness, or illness or death of a former childcare provider) (Dodson and Dickert 2004). Though essential, such contributions may carry great costs for the daughters. As Dodson and Dickert (2004, 326) put it bluntly, daughters "lose the opportunity to focus on their own young lives."

The opportunity costs that daughters suffer include sacrifices they make in their own educations so as to care for younger siblings or meet the familial needs they are asked to satisfy. Middle-schooler Davida is chronically late for school because she has to drop off her baby sister at day care before going to school herself. As described by a teacher, "She never says why, she just takes the punishment . . . she doesn't want to tell." Instead, she lives with the reputation of a careless, uninterested student (Dodson and Dickert 2004).

In keeping their families going, caring for siblings, or doing significant amounts of housework, there was often little time left to devote to schoolwork or to guarantee punctual and consistent attendance. After-school extracurricular activities such as homework clubs, sports programs, and theater and arts programs were luxuries that their lifestyles did not allow them.

Sons, too, may help, but daughters are perceived as more responsible and more "naturally inclined" to provide effective care for home and siblings. To Dodson and Dickert, the combination of educational inattentiveness and extracurricular uninvolvement that results leaves such young women less able to develop talents and abilities, discover interests, and build the confidence and competence they might need to find a way to improve the economic position from which they start. Instead, daughters of low-income families may become low-income mothers themselves (Dodson and Dickert 2004).

Although it is generally accepted that parents socialize their children differently according to gender there are differences between fathers and mothers. Fathers pressure their children more to behave in gender-appropriate ways. Fathers set higher standards of achievement for their sons than for their daughters, play more interactive games with their sons, and encourage them to explore their environments (Renzetti and Curran 2003). Fathers emphasize the interpersonal aspects of their relationships with their daughters and encourage closer parent–child proximity. Mothers also reinforce the interpersonal aspect of their parent–daughter relationships (Block 1983). They typically engage in more "emotion talk" with their daughters than with their sons, and—unsurprisingly—as early as first-grade girls are more adept at monitoring emotion and social behavior (Renzetti and Curran 2003).

Both parents of teenagers and the teenagers themselves believe that parents treat boys and girls differently. It is not clear, however, whether parents are reacting to existing differences or creating them (Fagot and Leinbach 1987). It is probably both, although by that age, gender differences are fairly well established in the minds of adolescents.

Various studies have indicated that ethnicity and social class are important in socialization (Renzetti and Curran 2003; Zinn 1990; see Wilkinson, Chow, and Zinn 1992 for scholarship on the intersection of ethnicity, class, and gender). Among Caucasians, working-class families tend to differentiate more sharply than middle-class families between boys and

girls in terms of appropriate behavior; they tend to place more restrictions on girls. African American families tend to socialize their children toward more egalitarian gender roles (Taylor 1994c). There is evidence that African American families socialize their daughters to be more independent than Caucasian families do. Indeed, among African Americans, the "traditional" female role model may never have existed. The African American female role model in which the woman is both wage earner and homemaker is more typical and more accurately reflects the African American experience (Lips 1997).

Other Sources of Socialization

Although primary, both in importance and in exposure, families are not the only influences on the ideas we acquire about gender. Our early lives are lived in the company of many others who shape our ideas about men and women, femininity and masculinity. As children grow even just a little older, their social world expands and so do their sources of learning.

SCHOOL. Around the time children enter day care centers or kindergarten, teachers (and peers, discussed next) become important influences. Day care centers, nursery schools, and kindergartens are often a child's first experience in the wider world outside the family. Teachers become important role models for their students. Because most day care, nursery school, kindergarten, and elementary schoolteachers are women, children tend to think of child–adult interactions as primarily taking place with women. Teachers also monitor children's behavior, reinforcing gender differences along the way.

A decade or so ago we could paint the following picture of gendered school experience. Classroom observations documented that boys were louder, more demanding, and received a disproportionate amount of the teacher's attention. Teachers called on boys more often, were more patient with boys in their explanations, and more generous toward them with their praise. Girls, praised for their appearance and the neatness of their work more than its substance or quality, grew more tentative and hesitant as they approached and entered middle school. By high school, they suffered drops in their self-esteem and self-confidence, prefacing their answers with disclaimers: "I'm probably wrong, but . . ." or "I'm not sure, but . . ." Intelligent girls often found that they were devalued by boys. Only in all-girl schools, argued Myra and David Sadker (1994), did female students assert themselves vigorously in class. The Sadkers believed that girls benefited from gender-segregated schools and classes by not having to compete with boys for the teacher's attention, not becoming overly concerned with their appearance, and not having to fear that their intelligence would make them undesirable as dates. The picture in coeducational settings was bleaker; coed schools had "failed at fairness," and girls suffered the harsher consequences (Sadker and Sadker 1994).

Fast forward to 2006. From kindergarten through high school, we are increasingly finding that it is boys, not girls, whose performance lags. Girls generally excel over boys in all areas during grade school. They have less difficulty learning to read, learn to read earlier, are more likely to recognize words by sight by the second half of first grade, score higher on fourth-grade standardized reading and writing tests, and are less likely to be diagnosed with learning or speech problems or to repeat a grade. Boys are twice as likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities or be placed in special-education classes (Tyre 2006). In middle school, girls score higher than boys on eighth-grade standardized reading and writing tests. In high school, girls take more advanced placement or honors biology classes, are more likely to plan on attending college, and are less likely to drop out. Twelfth-grade girls score, on average, 16 points higher on standardized reading tests and 24 points higher on standardized writing tests than twelfth-grade boys. Unsurprisingly, between 1980 and 2001 the number of boys who say they dislike school increased by nearly 75% (Tyre 2006).

Girls have long performed better than boys on standardized tests of verbal or writing ability but tended to lag, sometimes far behind, in math and science. More recent examination of math and science scores shows that the differences have greatly diminished. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study, one of the largest international comparisons of academic performance, examined math and science performance across 21 countries: Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. The United States was one of only three countries in which there was no significant gender difference in math scores. Although there was a gap between male and female science scores (in which males performed better than females), the U.S. gap was smaller than that for 19 of the other 20 countries in

the comparison. However, in physics and advanced math, U.S. male twelfth graders outperformed females, as was also true in most other countries.

As a result of the variety of trends noted here, increased attention and concern are being directed at what boys experience in school, why, and with what consequences (Pollack 1998; Sadker and Sadker 1994). For example, although boys have long commanded more teacher time and classroom attention than girls, the attention boys receive is not always positive—they are subject to more discipline and receive more of the teacher's anger than do girls, even when the disruptiveness of their behavior is similar. Furthermore, their academic performance often suffers, as indicated by their rates of failing, acting up, and/or dropping out (Sadker and Sadker 1994; Renzetti and Curran 1995; Pollack 1998). As school curricula become more rigid, more focused on assessment and demonstrating proficiency, teachers have less leeway to teach to the student's strengths or needs and less tolerance for the typically boy style of learning—disorganized, distracted, high energy, and potentially disruptive. Boys are also often unwilling to seek help and admit weakness. Much as the earlier call for all-girl schools was seen by some as a remedy for girl's school problems, it is now being embraced by some as a solution for what ails boys (Tyre 2006).

Gender doesn't operate alone in shaping school experiences. Race and class matter, too. In schools, black males face especially difficult circumstances and receive the most unfavorable teacher treatment when compared with white males, white females, or black females (Sadker and Sadker 1994; Basow 1992). They receive the most recommendations for special education and are subjected to low expectations by teachers. Teachers describe black males as having the worst work habits, and they predict lower levels of academic success for them, *regardless of their actual behavior* (Basow 1992).

PEERS. A child's age-mates, or **peers,** become especially important when the child enters school. By granting or withholding approval, friends and playmates have great influence on us. They may affect what games we play, what we wear, what music we listen to, what television programs we watch, and even what cereal we eat or beverage we drink. Peer influence is so pervasive that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that in some cases children's peers tell them what to think, feel, and do.

Peers also provide standards for gender-role behavior in several ways (Carter 1987), such as through the play activities they engage in, the toys with which they play, and the approval or disapproval they display, verbally or nonverbally, toward others' behavior. Children's perceptions of their friends' gender-role attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs encourage them to adopt similar ones so that they are accepted. If a girl's female friends play soccer, she is more likely to play soccer. If a boy's male friends display feelings, he is more likely to display feelings.

During adolescence, peers continue to have a strong influence, one that often leaves parents feeling helpless and as though their importance has been reduced in guiding or shaping their sons and daughters. But research indicates that parents can be more influential than peers (Gecas and Seff 1991). Parents influence their adolescent's behavior primarily by establishing norms, whereas peers influence others through modeling behavior. Even though parents tend to fear the worst from their children's peers, peers provide important positive influences. It is within their peer groups, for example, that adolescents learn to develop intimate relationships (Gecas and Seff 1991). Also, adolescents tend to be more egalitarian in gender roles than parents do, especially fathers (Thornton 1989).

POPULAR CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA. In all its forms, the mass media depict females and males quite differently. We can safely assert that the media typically have "ignored, trivialized, or condemned women," a process known as *symbolic annihilation* (Renzetti and Curran 2003).

Much of television programming promotes or condones negative stereotypes about gender, ethnicity, age, and gay men and lesbians. Women are significantly underrepresented on television (Media Report to Women 1999; Signorielli 1997). Through the 1970s, men outnumbered women on prime-time television three to one. Even on *Sesame Street,* 84% of the characters were male in 1992, compared with 76% 5 years earlier ("Muppet Gender Gap" 1993). Recent data reveals that nearly two-thirds of all prime-time television characters are male (65% versus 35% female), including 59% of the characters featured in programs' opening credits, an indication of characters of importance. Consistently, since 1999, female characters have been outnumbered by almost 2:1 (Children Now 2004).

The women depicted on television represent women less than the men depicted represent men. A 2003 study of gender and age of characters revealed that female characters continue to be younger than male characters. The largest percentage of female

characters was in the 20- to 29-year-old range, and the largest age range among male characters was 30 to 39. Furthermore, males are twice as likely as females (16% to 8%) to be in their 50s and 60s (Children Now 2004). Almost half of female characters are "thin and attractive"; only 16% of men are "thin or very thin" (Renzetti and Curran 2003; Signiorelli 1997). Television women are portrayed as emotional and needing emotional support; they are also sympathetic and nurturing. Not surprisingly, women are often portrayed as wives, mothers, or sex objects (Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992). Occupationally, although both male and female characters are displayed in a range of both high- and low-status jobs, looking at characters by their jobs reveals that attorneys, physicians, executives, and elected or appointed officials are usually male characters, whereas two-thirds or more of characters who are domestic workers, clerical workers, and nurses are female (Children Now 2004).

On television, male characters are shown as more aggressive and constructive than female characters. They solve problems and rescue others from danger. Only more recent prime-time series have portrayed males in emotional, nurturing roles. Still, 100% of characters who are full-time homemakers are female (Children Now 2004). Although things have improved, ethnic and sexual stereotypes continue to be commonly found in television.

Gender Development in Adulthood

Although more attention has been directed at early experiences and socialization in childhood and adolescence, gender development doesn't stop there. Many life experiences that we have in adulthood alter our ideas about and actions as males and females. Again, families loom large in reshaping our gendered ideas and behaviors. From a 1970s perspective known as *role transcendence,* an individual goes through three stages in developing his or her gender-role identity: (1) undifferentiated stage, (2) polarized stage, and (3) transcendent stage (Hefner, Rebecca, and Oleshansky 1975).

Young children have not clearly differentiated their activities into those considered appropriate for males or females. As children enter school, however, they begin to identify behaviors as masculine or feminine. They tend to polarize masculinity and femininity as they test the appropriate roles for themselves. As they enter young adulthood, they slowly begin to shed the rigid male–female polarization as they are confronted with the realities of relationships. As they mature and grow older, men and women transcend traditional masculinity and femininity. They combine masculinity and femininity into a more complex role.

More recent research details some of the ways adult life experiences can transform how we act as a male or female (Gerson 1985, 1993; Risman 1986, 1987, 1988, 1998). These more structural analyses have shown how adult life experiences both inside and outside of families have the potential to restructure our identity, redefine our role responsibilities, and take us in directions quite different from those suggested by our early gender socialization. In adulthood, new or different sources of gender-role learning may include marriage and parenthood, as well as college and experiences in the workplace.

COLLEGE. Within the past 30 years, the undergraduate student population has shifted from being 58% male to 56% female (Tyre 2006). Unlike high school, in the college setting, many young adults learn to think critically, to exchange ideas, and to discover the bases for their actions. There, many young adults first encounter alternatives to traditional gender roles, either in their personal relationships or in their courses. A longitudinal study of gender roles found that traditional and egalitarian gender-role attitudes affected dating relationships in college but had little effect on later life (Peplau, Hill, and Rubin 1993).

MARRIAGE. Marriage is an important source of gender-role learning because it creates the roles of husband and wife. For many individuals, no one is more important than a partner in shaping gender-role behaviors through interaction. Our partners have expectations of how we should act as a husband or wife, and these expectations are important in shaping behavior.

Husbands tend to believe in innate gender roles more than wives do. This should not be especially surprising, because men tend to be more traditional and less egalitarian about gender roles. Husbands stand to gain more in marriage by believing that women are "naturally" better at cooking, cleaning, shopping, and caring for children.

PARENTHOOD. For most men and women, motherhood alters life more significantly and visibly than fatherhood does. For some men, fatherhood may mean

little more than providing for their children. It is unlikely to find many who would associate motherhood only with providing. As parents, mothers do more, are expected to do more, and are expected to juggle this "more" with their paid employment. As a consequence, fatherhood does not typically create the same degree of work–family conflict that motherhood does. Fathers who strive to be a fully or nearly equal coparent will, however, discover the ways in which the demands of parenthood clash with demands of the workplace. Whereas traditionally a man's work role allowed him to fulfill much of his perceived parental obligation, we now expect more out of fathers.

Not only have our expectations shifted toward more nurturing versions of fatherhood, but where traditional fatherhood was tied to marriage, today a third of all current births occur outside of marriage and nearly half of all current marriages end in divorce. What, then, is the father's role for a man who is not married to his child's mother or who is divorced and does not have custody? What are his role obligations as a single father as distinguished from those of married fathers? For many men, the answers are painfully unclear, as evidenced by the low rates of contact between unmarried or divorced fathers and their children.

Women today have somewhat greater latitude as wives. It is now both accepted and expected that women will work outside the home at least until they become mothers and more than likely that they will continue or return to paid employment sometime after they have children. Even with increases in the numbers of women who remain childless, women may be expected to become mothers and be subjected to social pressure toward motherhood. Once children are born, roles tend to become more traditional, even in previously nontraditional marriages. Often, the wife remains at home, at least for a time, and the husband continues full-time work outside the home. The woman must then balance her roles as wife and mother against her needs and those of her family.

THE WORKPLACE. It is well established that men and women are psychologically affected by their occupations (Menaghan and Parcel 1991; Schooler 1987). Work that encourages self-direction, for example, makes people more active, flexible, open, and democratic; restrictive jobs tend to lower self-esteem and make people more rigid and less tolerant. If we accept that sex-segregated female occupations are often of lower status with little room for self-direction, we can understand why some women are not as achievement oriented as men. With different opportunities for promotion, men and women may express different attitudes toward achievement. Women may downplay their desire for promotion, suggesting that promotions would interfere with their family responsibilities. But this really may be related to a need to protect themselves from frustration because many women are in jobs where promotion to management positions is unlikely.

Household work affects women psychologically in many of the same ways that paid work affects them in female-dominated occupations, such as clerical and service jobs (Schooler 1987). Women in both situations feel greater levels of frustration because of the repetitive nature of the work, time pressures, and being held responsible for things outside their control. Such circumstances do not encourage self-esteem, creativity, or a desire to achieve.

Remaking Women and Men

Focusing on adulthood is important because it reveals the gaps that often exist between earlier gender socialization and adult experiences. The lives we lead are often different from those we were raised to lead or expected to lead (Gerson 1993; Risman 1987, 1998). To some scholars, this diminishes the importance of socialization and discredits theories that deterministically link early socialization to later life outcomes (Gerson 1993). In some ways, those theories are no better than *biological determinism,* in which we are limited to those behaviors that our genetic or hormonal characteristics allow. They simply substitute socialization for biology (Risman 1989).

Socialization is important, especially in affecting our expectations and offering us role models for lives we might live. But life is more circuitous than linear. Unanticipated twists and turns often take us in directions we neither expected nor intended. Research on women's and men's career and family experiences bear this out. For example, Kathleen Gerson's research on women's and men's career and family choices reveals that many people develop commitments to either careers or parenting that stem from their experiences in jobs and relationships (Gerson 1985, 1993). Some women and men who anticipate "traditional" adult outcomes move in nontraditional directions based on

Popular Culture

Video Gender: Gender, Music Videos, and Video Games

Over the past 25 years, recreation and entertainment, especially for young people, increasingly encompass video images and technologies. Popular music was revolutionized by the "invention" of the music video and by the inception of MTV, which premiered in 1981. An estimated 350 million households worldwide tune in to MTV, and three-fourths of all 12–19 year-old females and males watch MTV regularly, averaging more than 6 hours a week (6.2 for females, 6.6 for males) (National Institute on Media and the Family 2001).

Meanwhile, the video game industry has revolutionized "play" for millions of young Americans, especially males. Billions of dollars and countless hours have been spent on arcade or home video games (Dietz 1998). Since his first appearance in 1981 Super Mario has become a fixture in millions of households. Mario is the central figure in the various *Super Mario Brothers* games, which sold a combined 184 million copies between 1983 and 2005. Together these media have also altered the experience of gender socialization.

Video Games

Although the average age of video game players is now 29 (Gentile and Gentile 2005), concern is perhaps greatest regarding the quantity and quality of exposure of younger populations. Research indicates that the average 2- to 17-year-old in the United States plays video games for 7 hours a week (Gentile and Walsh 2002). Such a figure is a bit misleading, however, because it masks the sizable differences between the genders. For example, Douglas Gentile and colleagues (2004) found that, in their study of video games and aggressive behavior, the average time males spent playing video games was more than 2.5 times the average for females (13 hours a week compared to 5 hours for females). Elementary and middle school–age girls play an average of 5.5 hours compared to 13 hours for their male peers. Children 2 to 7 years old play an average of 43 minutes a day. Other research, looking exclusively at the youngest children (2 to 5 years old), reports that they play an average of 28 minutes daily (see Gentile and Gentile 2005; Gentile and Anderson, 2006). Douglas Gentile and J. Ronald Gentile (2005) found that 15% of their eighth- and ninth-grade subjects and 5% of their college-age subjects could be classified as "addicted" to video games; 86% of the addicted adolescents were males.

Aggression and violence are major components of many games. Content analyses document that 89% of video games feature some violent content, and half the time serious violence is directed at other game characters (Children Now 2001), in which such characters suffer serious injury or die (Gentile and Gentile 2005). Male characters mostly are the perpetrators of video game violence, and their targets are generally other male characters or some nonhuman characters (such as monsters, aliens, creatures, or animals). Occasionally (20% in one study of a sample of 33 Nintendo or Sega games), violence is directed at female characters, although that is not typical (Dietz 1998). Overall, violent themes and aggressive action are commonplace.

In most video games, when females are present, they are most often either victims ("damsels in distress") or sex objects ("visions of beauty with large breasts and thin hips"); they are rarely heroes or action characters. In the typical video game, females are absent (Dietz 1998). In the earliest story lines of some of the most popular series, the main male characters are trying to save a female. Later "chapters" alter this plot but keep intact the male hero trying to save his village, city, or world. The *Zelda* and *Mario* series are tame, however, in comparison to a more disturbing trend in games geared for teens and older players.

In their 2002 annual "video game report card," the National Institute on Media and the Family, describe a "growing tendency" to portray females as targets or recipients of "graphic violence" in some of the best-selling and most popular games. For a particularly disturbing example,

the levels of fulfillment and opportunity at work, the experiences and aspirations of their partners, and their experiences with children. Similarly, men and women who aspire to nontraditional outcomes (career attachment for women, involved fatherhood for men) may "reluctantly" abandon those directions as a result of firsthand experiences at home and work.

Barbara Risman's research on single custodial fathers pointed to similar adult development. Men who reluctantly found themselves as lone, custodial parents

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in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City,* one of the most popular games, players are rewarded for kicking a prostitute to death (http://www.mediafamily.org).

Music Videos

With innovations such as the iPod revolutionizing the experience of listening to music, listening continues to be important in our lives—adolescents, for example, listen to about 10,500 hours of it between seventh and twelfth grade. Still, for 25 years now, music has come to be "seen," as well as heard. Visual images are as important as the music and the lyrics; indeed, the images may even be more important than the music.

Studies of gender stereotypes and ratios of males and females portrayed in music videos have consistently found males featured more extensively and portrayed more widely than females (Seidman 1999). Of the "characters" featured (including performers, dancers, and any characters in more storytelling videos), 63% were male. Steven Seidman (1999) further reported that in examining characters in MTV videos, there was much gender stereotyping: more than 90% of the occupational roles that we would typically classify as male (for example, manual laborer, physician, and mechanic) were portrayed by male actors and 100% of the stereotypically female occupational roles (for example, secretary, librarian, and phone operator) featured females. Some specific, and striking, distributions: more than 90% of manual laborers, police personnel, photographers, and soldiers and all stage hands, criminals, and politicians were males. Females made up 85% of the dancers and, as characters, all domestic cleaners, fashion models, and prostitutes (Seidman 1999).

Although there is considerable verbal or physical aggressiveness in music and video games (Kalis and Neuendorf 1989), there is a lesser level of violence in music videos than in video games. A study of four major music television networks found a range of violent videos from 11% to 22%. In one content analysis study of 391 acts of music video violence, males were the aggressors in 78% of the incidents. Females were victims or targets 46% of the time (Rich et al. 1998).

In music videos, female aggression is often provoked by jealousy. Male aggression is often unprovoked. Aggression is often a part of male swagger—the assertion of power and status—especially in heavy metal and rap videos. Critic James Twitchell (1992) contends that music videos "are rife with adolescent misogyny, homophobia, and threats of violence. They are rude, bawdy, boastful, with a kind of 'in your face' aggression . . . characteristic of insecure masculinity."

Most music videos are dominated by male singers or male groups, and women may be present mostly to provide erotic backdrop or vocal backup (Seidman 1992; Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan, and Davis 1993). Often, women are depicted as sex objects, pictured condescendingly, are provocatively dressed, or all of these. One study found that adolescent or male viewers generally rated music videos, especially sexually provocative ones, more positively than did older or female viewers (Greeson 1991). Another study found that both male and female undergraduates responded with positive emotions to music videos with sexual content; they responded negatively to those with violence. The music videos declined in appeal when sex and violence were combined (Hansen and Hansen 1990).

Cumulatively, video games and music videos become part of the gender socialization process. Their themes—male as aggressive and violent, females as sex objects and victims—fit, both with each other and with other popular media content (such as television, film, cartoons, and advertising). Clearly, no single game or video will determine a person's attitudes toward women or propensity toward violence. Collectively, however, such images help shape and reinforce traditional gender attitudes and make aggressive outcomes more likely.

developed nurturing abilities that their socialization had not included. More important than how they were raised was how they interacted with their children, as well as the lack of a female in their lives to whom caregiving tasks could be assigned. Thus, these single fathers "mothered" their children in ways that were more like women's relationships with children than what we would have predicted (Risman 1986). Importantly, socialization contributes to but neither guarantees us nor restricts us to any particular family outcome.

Gender Matters in Family Experiences

Within the past generation, there has been a significant shift from traditional toward more egalitarian gender roles (Brewster and Padavic 2000). Women have changed more than men, but men are changing. These changes seem to affect all classes, although not to the same extent. Also, there is still resistance to change as those from more conservative religious groups, such as Mormons, Catholics, and fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants, continue to adhere more strongly to traditional roles (Jensen and Jensen 1993).

Contemporary gender-role attitudes have changed partly as a response to the steady increase in women's participation in the labor force. Although this increase was especially evident in the 1970s and 1980s, as was the move toward more egalitarian attitudes, it continued through the 1990s. College-educated women and men, especially, are considerably less likely to hold traditional ideas about gender, work, and family roles (Brewster and Padavic 2000).

Within the family, although attitudes toward gender roles have become more liberal, in practice, gender roles continue to place women at a disadvantage, especially by making them responsible for housekeeping and childcare activities (Atkinson 1987; Coltrane 2000; Hochschild 1989). Some of the most important changes affecting men's and women's roles in the family are briefly described in the following sections.

Men's Roles in Families and Work

In traditional gender-role stereotypes, many of the traits ascribed to one gender are not ascribed to the other. Theoretically, men's instrumental traits complemented women's expressive ones, much as (Hort, Fagot, and Leinbach 1990) women's and men's traditional family roles complemented each other.

Central features of the traditional male role, whether among Caucasians, African Americans, Latinos, or Asian Americans, include dominance, work, and family. Males are generally regarded as being more power oriented than females. Statistically, men demonstrate higher degrees of aggression, especially violent aggression (such as assault, homicide, and rape); seek to dominate and lead; and show greater competitiveness. Although aggressive traits are thought to be useful in the corporate world, politics, and the military, such characteristics are rarely helpful to a man in fulfilling marital and family roles requiring understanding, cooperation, communication, and nurturing.

Traditionally, across ethnic and racial lines, male roles have centered on providing, and the centrality of men's work identity affected their family roles as husbands and fathers. Men's identity as providers take precedence over all other family functions, such as nurturing and caring for children, doing housework, preparing meals, and being intimate. Because of this focus, traditional men may become confused by their spouses' expectations of intimacy; they believe that they are good husbands simply because they are good providers (Rubin 1983). When circumstances render them unable to provide, the blow to their self-identities can be quite powerful (Rubin 1994).

The somewhat traditional gender rhetoric of the 1990s Million Man March on Washington, D.C., by African American men was not that far from the more explicitly traditional rhetoric espoused by the Christian Promise Keepers. Both groups implored men to live up to their responsibilities to their families and communities, and central to the familial responsibilities was to lead and provide.

However, because race, ethnicity, and economic status often overlap, certain categories of men face more difficulty meeting the expectations of the traditional provider role. Because African Americans and Latinos often fare less well economically, men often are left unable to lay claim to the household status and power that traditional masculine roles promise.

Occasionally, characterizations of Latino families have exaggerated the extent of male dominance, as suggested by the notion of *machismo.* Although such a notion may have been somewhat more accurate in depicting gender ideologies of rural Mexico and the Caribbean in the first half of the twentieth century, it is inaccurately applied to contemporary Latino families (McLoyd et al. 2000b). Both African American and Chicano men have more positive attitudes toward employed wives. Ethnic differences in traditional notions of masculinity and men's roles are more evident among older and less educated African Americans and among Mexican Americans not born in the United States (McLoyd et al. 2000b).

Because the key assumption about male gender roles has been the centrality of work and economic success, many earlier researchers failed to look closely

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at how men interacted within their families. Over the past 2 decades, as part of a closer examination of men's lives, we witnessed a dramatic increase in the popular and scholarly attention paid to men's family lives (see, for example, Cohen 1987, 1993; Coltrane 1996; Gerson 1993; Daly 1993, 1996; LaRossa 1988; Popenoe 1996; and Marsiglio 1998).

Researchers finally began to ask about men's lives some of the same questions previously asked about women, looking at whether and how men juggle paid work and family and maintain sufficient involvement in each (Gerson 1993; Daly 1996; Coltrane 1996). Although we may not yet treat working fathers with the same concern we bring to working mothers, we have made strides in examining how men experience conflicts between work and parenting.

In addition, research indicates that men consider their family role to be much broader than that of family breadwinner (Cohen 1993; Gerson 1993; Coltrane 1996). Other dimensions of men's experiences include emotional, psychological, community, and legal dimensions; they also include housework and childcare activities (Goetting 1982). Later chapters will look at men's experiences of marriage, parenting, and the division of household labor.

Still, even with enlarged emphasis on men's more nurturing qualities, men continue to be expected to work and to support or help support their families. Although their financial contributions may be no less essential to maintain their family standard of living or even remain out of poverty, women are not judged as successful wives and mothers based on whether they succeed at paid employment. As a result, men have less role freedom than women to choose whether to work (Russell 1987; Cohen and Durst 2001). When a man's roles of worker and father come into conflict, usually it is the father role that suffers. A father may want to spend time with his children, but his job does not allow flexibility. Because he must provide income for his family, he will not be able to be more involved in parenting. In a familiar scene, a child comes into the father's home office to play, and the father says, "Not now. I'm busy working. I'll play with you later." When the child returns, the "not now, I'm busy" phrase is repeated. The scene recurs as the child grows up, and one day, as his child leaves home, the father realizes that he never got to know him or her.

Many men strive to avoid this potential nightmare and prevent the father–child estrangement that they may remember experiencing as children. They go out of their way to be more involved and more nurturing with their children. However, what they learn is that the complexity of juggling work and family is not restricted to women. Men who attempt the same juggling act often experience similar role strain and role overload (Gerson 1993).

In addition, men continue to have greater difficulty expressing their feelings than do women (Real 1997). Men tend to cry less and show love, happiness, and sadness less. When men do express their feelings, they are more forceful, domineering, and boastful; women, in contrast, tend to express their feelings more gently and quietly. When a woman asks a man what he feels, a common response is "I don't know" or "Nothing." Such men have lost touch with their inner lives because they have repressed feelings that they have learned are inappropriate. This male inexpressiveness often makes men strangers to both themselves and their partners.

Men continue to expect and, in many cases, are expected to be the dominant member in a relationship. Unfortunately, the male sense of power and command often does not facilitate personal

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■ *As contemporary male gender roles allow increasing expressiveness, men are encouraged to nurture their children.*

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relationships. Without mutual respect and equality, genuine intimacy is difficult to achieve. We cannot control another person and at the same time be intimate with that person.

Women's Roles in Families and Work

Although the main features of traditional male gender roles vary more by class than ethnicity, there are more striking ethnic differences in traditional female roles.

Traditional white female gender roles center on women's roles as wives and mothers. When a woman leaves adolescence, she is expected to either go to college or to marry and have children. Although a traditional woman may work before marriage, she is not expected to defer marriage for work goals, and soon after marriage she is expected to be "expecting." Within the household, she is expected to subordinate herself to her husband. Often this subordination is sanctioned by religious teachings.

We still know relatively less about the lives of married African American women, as most research focuses more upon unmarried mothers and the poor (Wyche 1993). Yet we know that the traditional Caucasian female gender role does not extend to African American women. This may be attributed to a combination of the African heritage, slavery (which subjugated women to the same labor and hardships as men), and economic discrimination that pushed women into the labor force. Karen Drugger (1988) notes:

> A primary cleavage in the life experiences of Black and White women is their past and present relationship to the labor process. In consequence, Black women's conceptions of womanhood emphasize self-reliance, strength, resourcefulness, autonomy, and the responsibility of providing for the material as well as emotional needs of family members. Black women do not see labor-force participation and being a wife and mother as mutually exclusive; rather, in Black culture, employment is an integral, normative, and traditional component of the roles of wife and mother.

One study (Leon 1993) found that African American women appear more instrumental than either Caucasian or Latina women; they also have more flexible gender and family roles. African American men are generally more supportive than Caucasian or Latino men of egalitarian gender roles.

In traditional Latina gender roles, the notion of *Marianismo* has been the cultural counterpart to *machismo*. Drawn from the Catholic ideal of the Virgin Mary, *Marianismo* stresses women's roles as self-sacrificing mothers suffering for their children (McLoyd et al. 2000b). Thus, traditional Latino women are expected to subordinate themselves to males (Vasquez-Nuttall, Romero-Garcia, and De Leon 1987). But this subordination is based more on respect for the male's role as provider than on subservience (Becerra 1988). It also appears to be waning. Latina women are increasingly adopting values incompatible with a belief in male dominance and female subordination. They also display higher levels of marital satisfaction and less depression when their husbands share more of the domestic work (McLoyd et al. 2000b). Wives have greater equality if they are employed; they also have more rights in the family if they are educated (Baca Zinn 1994).

Latino gender roles, unlike those of Anglos, are strongly affected by age roles in which the young subordinate themselves to the old. In this dual arrangement, notes Rosina Becerra (1988), "females are viewed as submissive, naive, and somewhat childlike. Elders are viewed as wise, knowledgeable, and deserving of respect." As a result of this intersection of gender and age roles, older women are treated with greater deference than younger women.

Even though the traditional roles for white women have typically been those of wife and mother, increasingly over the past few decades an additional role has been added: employed worker or professional. It is now generally expected that most women will be employed at various times in their lives. Women generally attempt to reduce the conflict between work and family roles by giving family roles precedence. As a result, they tend to work outside the home in greatest numbers before motherhood and after divorce, when single mothers generally become responsible for supporting their families. After marriage, most women are employed even after the arrival of the first child. Regardless of whether a woman is working full-time, she almost always continues to remain responsible for housework and childcare.

Cultural expectations impose high standards of devotion and labor-intensive self-sacrifice on women who become mothers, what is described as the **intensive mothering ideology**—the belief that children need full-time, unconditional attention from moth-

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Issues and Insights Gender Ideals in Middle-Class Black Families

[When I decide to get married, my mate] has to have fatherhood qualities. He has to like kids. He needs to be ambitious and motivated. He has to have a set of career aspirations. . . . He needs to be employed. If he lost his job, then, you know, we'll cope with that for a couple of months. But he's got to go out there and get a job.

Such are the words of Ms. Morgan, a 31-year-old single African American woman, interviewed by sociologist Faustina Haynes. Haynes undertook an exploratory study of the gender ideals evident among a sample of middle-class African Americans. Asking her sample of middle-class black men and women what they expect or expected from marital life, Haynes challenges what she sees as overgeneralized portraits of black families.

Based on a tendency in the research literature on African American family life to focus on working-class and lower-class black families, certain impressions have been formed and stereotypes perpetuated. Among these is the idea that black families are *egalitarian,* embodying a more equal division of domestic and paid labor than their counterparts among other racial groups, or *matriarchal,* with black men being relatively absent and unimportant because of their economic difficulties and failures. Noting that, traditionally, the dominant culture in the United States has defined men as household heads and providers, Haynes suggests that characterizations of black families as *either* egalitarian *or* matriarchal makes them seem deviant, as they are said to depart from this long-standing white, middle-class norm.

Based on her interviews with a small sample of 19 black female and 15 black male high schoolteachers, Haynes found the following attitudes to be prevalent:

- Respondents possess what Haynes refers to as *neopatriarchal* gender ideals. That is, the females see men with expressive qualities and egalitarian ideas as attractive but not if they lack instrumental characteristics, especially those associated with successful providing. Similarly, men see women with instrumental characteristics as appealing, but women who lack expressive characteristics as well are not desirable as potential spouses. They further expect to pass these beliefs to their children. Girls will be raised to be feminine, little ladies and womanly. Boys will be raised to be masculine and manly.
- Both the male and the female schoolteachers contend that they have always anticipated egalitarian relationships. Single women and men say they expect to share tasks and finances equally. Married respondents expected before they married to share, and they continue to expect to share.
- Despite stated desires to share, household activities and family roles are still perceived to be gender specific. Although they are not traditional, they also are not egalitarian. Haynes calls them *transitionalists* (Hochschild 1989), in that they neither identify fully with traditional roles nor completely embrace the idea that women and men are fully equal.
- Men and women reject the idea that wives are subservient to their husbands. However, both female and male respondents believe that "men, especially Black men, have to and should be in the provider roles in their families to feel 'like men'" (Haynes 2000, 834).
- To account for less than equal sharing, female respondents suggest that *competence* determines actual task allocation; a household task should be done by whoever is better at that task. Haynes notes that the desire for egalitarian household roles is thus thwarted by experience. Raised in more traditional households, females have "become better" at domestic tasks than men have. As a consequence, women carry more responsibility for household tasks because they "are good at them." Meanwhile, men continue to suffer from the demands of the provider role because they are expected to be providers for their families.

Haynes reminds us of the dangers in characterizing group differences without attention to the multiple factors (for example, race, gender, and social class) that shape both gender beliefs and familial behavior. Although other research supports the generalization that African American husbands perform a statistically significant greater amount of housework (Greenstein 1996), Haynes' study reminds us this need not mean that they depart entirely or even widely from some long-standing gender expectations.

SOURCE: Haynes 2000, 811–837.

ers to develop into healthy, well-adjusted people. This puts all mothers in a demanding position, but it creates a particularly difficult dilemma for mothers who also choose or need to work outside the home (Hays 1996). It leads increasing numbers of women to question whether they should have children and, if

they do, how much of their time and attention their children need.

Women from ethnic and minority groups, however, are less likely than Caucasians to view motherhood as an impediment. African American women and Latinas tend to place greater value on motherhood than the Caucasian or Anglo majority. For African Americans, tradition has generally combined work and motherhood; the two are not viewed as necessarily antithetical (Basow 1993). For Latinas, the cultural and religious emphasis on family, the higher status conferred on motherhood, and their own familial attitudes have contributed to high birthrates (Jorgensen and Adams 1988).

Although husbands were once the final authority, wives have greatly increased their power in decision making. Today they are expected not to be submissive but to have significant, if not equal, input in marital decision making. This trend toward equality is limited in practice by an unspoken rule of marital equality: "Husbands and wives are equal, but husbands are more equal." In practice, husbands may continue to have greater power than wives, becoming what sociologist John Scanzoni (1982) once described as the "senior partner" of the marriage.

This is not absolute or inevitable, however. Interesting exceptions to this pattern exist, especially among some dual-earner couples. Some couples develop and act upon an ideology of sharing and fairness, valuing and pursuing such relationship characteristics as equality and equity (Schwartz 1994; Risman and Johnson-Sumerford 1997). Although these "peer" and **postgender relationships** (that is, relationships lived outside the constraints of gender expectations) are not yet the norm, they reflect the most concerted efforts to establish greater equality in marriage.

Breakdown of the Instrumental and Expressive Dichotomy

The identification of masculinity with instrumentality and femininity with expressiveness appears to be breaking down. Men perceive themselves to be more instrumental than do women and women perceive themselves as being more expressive than do men. A substantial minority of both genders is relatively high in both instrumentality and expressiveness or is low in both. It is interesting that the instrumental and expressiveness ratings men and women give each other have little to do with how they rate themselves as masculine or feminine (Spence and Sawin 1985).

Constraints of Contemporary Gender Roles

Even though substantially more flexibility is offered to men and women today, contemporary gender roles and expectations continue to limit our potential. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that some stereotypes about gender traits are still very much alive. Men are perceived as having more undesirable self-oriented traits (such as being arrogant, self-centered, and domineering) than women. Women are viewed as having more traits reflecting a lack of a healthy sense of self (such as being servile and spineless).

Research suggests that the traditional female gender role does not facilitate self-confidence or mental health. Both men and women tend to see women as being less competent than men. A study by Lyn Brown and Carol Gilligan (1992) revealed that the self-esteem of adolescent girls plummeted between the age of 9 and the time they started high school.

The combination of gender-role stereotypes and racial or ethnic discrimination tends to encourage feelings of both inadequacy and lack of physical attractiveness among African American women, Latinas, and Asian American women (Basow 1993).

The situation of contemporary women in dual-earner households imposes its own constraints on women's lives. Because they continue to shoulder the bulk of responsibility for housework and childcare *on top of full-time jobs,* they often experience fatigue, stress, resentment, and lack of leisure (Hochschild 1989). Especially for women who try to be "supermoms," the volume and complexity of work and family can force them to cut back on their aspirations or compromise their expectations for marriage and motherhood (Hochschild 1989, 1997). Significantly, despite the ongoing stresses, women who "juggle" are less distressed and more fulfilled than full-time homemakers (Crosby 1991).

Finally, there is still a "double standard of aging" that treats men and women differently. As women grow older, they tend to be regarded as more masculine and as unattractive. As men age, they become distinguished; women simply become older. Masculinity is associated with independence, assertiveness, self-control, and physical ability; with the exception of physical

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ability, none of these traits necessarily decreases with age. Because older women are considered to have lost their attractiveness and because they have fewer potential partners, they are less likely to marry.

Resistance to Change

We may think that we want change, but both men and women reinforce traditional gender-role stereotypes among themselves and each other (Hort, Fagot, and Leinbach 1990). Both genders react more negatively to men displaying so-called female traits (such as crying easily or needing security) than to women displaying male traits (such as assertiveness or worldliness), and both define male gender-role stereotypes more rigidly than they do female stereotypes. Men, however, do not define women as rigidly as women do men. And both men and women describe the ideal female in androgynous terms (Hort, Fagot, and Leinbach 1990).

Despite the limitations that traditional gender roles may place on us, changing them is not easy. Gender roles are closely linked to self-evaluation. Our sense of adequacy often depends on gender-role performance as defined by parents and peers in childhood ("You're a good boy" or "You're a good girl"). Because gender roles often seem to be an intrinsic part of our personality and temperament, we may defend these roles as being natural, even if they are destructive to a relationship or to ourselves. To threaten an individual's gender role is to threaten his or her gender identity as male or female because people do not generally make the distinction between gender role and gender identity. Such threats are an important psychological mechanism that keeps people in traditional roles.

Furthermore, the social structure reinforces traditional gender norms and behaviors and makes change more difficult. Some religious groups, for example, strongly support traditional gender roles. The Catholic Church, conservative Protestantism, Orthodox Judaism, and fundamentalist Islam, for example, view traditional roles as being divinely ordained. Accordingly, to violate these norms is to violate God's will. The marketplace also helps enforce traditional gender roles. The wage disparity between men and women (remember, women earn about 75% of what men earn) is a case in point. Such a significant difference in income makes it "rational" that the man's work role takes precedence over the woman's work role. If someone needs to remain at home to care for the children or an elderly relative, it makes "economic sense" for a heterosexual woman to quit her job because her male partner probably earns more money.

Gender Movements and the Family

Gender issues have been the source of much collective action and the focus of a number of social movements that press for change. These movements include the

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The National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Promise Keepers are two examples of organized gender movements. In the rhetoric and rallies that comprise such movements, family issues loom large.

Real Families Degendering Marriage and Family

Making Gender Matter Less

When asked by sociologist John Durst to reflect on her situation, then 32-year-old Karen Wilson described having what she considered an almost ideal life. "Oh, how much time do you have. . . . Do you have like three hours? I love it! I love it! God, there's just so many things about it." Karen is a success in her career in sales and promotions for a communications company. She has a husband she loves and two children she adores, a 3-year-old daughter and a 4-month-old son. After having had an on-again, off-again work history, followed by a stint as a stay-at-home mom, an opportunity presented itself for her to become the full-time breadwinner and for her husband, Kevin, to stay home with their two young children. Here's her description of how she and Kevin reached the arrangement they have and what she most enjoys about it:

> You know what, we talked about this before we got married. I spent all this money on my education [earning both a bachelor's and a master's degree] so that I could go to work. I planned on working after I had kids. [I told Kevin] . . . "if you want to stay home, great, but I can't stand it!" And he said, "Yeah, we can do that." Then, BAM! This opportunity came along for me to make more money than he was and I said, "You wanna do it? You wanna live the dream?"

Pushed to identify what she sees as the biggest positives of her lifestyle, she enthusiastically replied:

> I like being able to get away between 8 and 5 and to have a lot more control over my life without having to worry about two other responsibilities (son and daughter) and Kevin, too. I should say all three of them. I like that. I like being able to turn it off and just go, but I like coming back and having my daughter's little face pressed against the window (waiting), Kevin standing there with a beer in his hand, the dog running around me, it's really nice to come home to. . . . I love bringing home the paycheck and telling Kevin, "Here, honey, split it up. . . ." I love that. I love contributing; I just think it's the ultimate.
>
> I love not having all the responsibilities he has. I hated cooking. I hated the dishes, the laundry—I felt like it was the least rewarding job anybody could have because you never get any pats on the back. I like having a title and being able to say, "This is what I do. I'm contributing to my family." What else? I like being able to go out to lunch and playing with the "big dogs." I like doing that.
>
> I feel like I paid for my education and I deserve that, to try that, to work on it. I like the intellectual stimulation I get from doing that. . . . And I like that Kevin's just so calm and relaxed and really laid back. The kids keep him moving constantly yet at the end of the day he's still relaxed enough to talk to me. I think it's been really wonderful.

Research on intimate relationships, marriage, and family consistently reveals the importance of gender in dividing up domestic responsibilities and shaping personal and familial experiences. Women perform two to three times as much housework as men, and employed wives experience greater stress and enjoy less leisure than their husbands (Coltrane 2000). The consistency with which such inequalities are reported may give the impression of inevitability, that they are somehow unavoidable parts of marriage and parenthood, but couples such as the Wilsons offer a more hopeful scenario to those who might

range of perspectives within the contemporary women's movement but also various "men's movements," that, although less visible, have organized to change aspects of men's lives. We look briefly here at some of the ways these movements have framed and acted on family matters.

A complete history of American feminism is beyond the scope of this book. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, women organized around issues such as economic justice, abolition of slavery, temperance, and women's suffrage. In their antislavery activity during the nineteenth century, many women were sensitized to the extent of their own oppression and disadvantage, which helped energize their pursuit of voting rights (Renzetti and Curran 1999; Lindsey 1997). After gaining the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1919, many women withdrew from active feminist involvement because they thought they had reached equality with men (Renzetti and Curran 1999).

During the 1960s, feminism resurfaced dramatically. Catalyzed by the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique,* many women began to look critically at the sources of their "problems with no

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wish to someday depart from the norm, whether to create more equal partnerships or, more dramatically, reverse roles.

Sociologists Barbara Risman and Danette Johnson-Sumerford interviewed their own sample of 15 couples who explicitly reject conventional conceptions of gender, opting instead for more gender-neutral relationships. That is, they carefully and intentionally share responsibility for paid work and share responsibility as caregivers for their children. At minimum, they "changed how gender works in their families." Furthermore, "in the negotiation of marital roles and responsibilities, they have moved beyond using gender as their guidepost" (Risman and Johnson-Sumerford 1998, 24).

Let's look briefly at the different paths couples took to construct their "postgender" marriages.

- *Dual-career couples.* The most common path to "postgender marriage" begins with a marriage of two career-oriented professionals in which at least the wife, but preferably the husband as well, values equality and is committed to sharing. Both partners retain strong career commitments, although both scale back to achieve the lifestyle they desire.
- *Dual nurturers.* Dual-nurturer couples place their priorities on home and family, not careers. Their work is for money to enable them to spend their time together and with their children. In one dual-nurturer couple, neither spouse had consistently held a full-time job. Instead, they pieced together part-time work, seeing to it that they weren't both working simultaneously each day.
- *Posttraditionalists.* This path begins with a traditional arrangement, meaning a gender-based division of household roles and labor, although not necessarily male breadwinner–female home-maker. Couples found themselves dissatisfied in gender-based arrangements, whether in their current or a former marriage and were strongly motivated to avoid the sort of unfairness that often plagues dual-earner couples.
- *External forces.* This path consists of couples "pushed" by circumstance (for example, economic factors such as a wife's higher salary and less flexible work schedule than her husband or an illness) toward more equal domestic arrangements. Whatever the circumstances, they came to recognize and appreciate the gender equality that resulted.

Regardless of the route couples took to arrive at their postgender family arrangements, they used criteria other than gender to organize their daily activities. They have rejected the ideas that "wifehood involves a script of domestic service or that breadwinning is an aspect of successful masculinity" (Risman and Johnson-Sumerford 1998). Such couples are still rare and their lifestyles may require high levels of female income and professional autonomy if women are to be able to move beyond male dominance or privilege. Furthermore, all but two couples employ paid help with domestic tasks such as cleaning, dusting, bathrooms, and yard work, which made life easier and made fairness more achievable. However, couples who used paid help reported that domestic responsibilities had been shared even before they started paying for housekeeping services.

The significance of couples like the Wilsons or Risman and Johnson-Sumerford's postgender couples is that they reveal a wider range of possible marital outcomes than most literature reports. There is no inevitable inequality that engulfs married couples. Equality and fairness take work and persistence but are possible for those who seek them.

names," and the family was seen as a major culprit. In addition, wage inequality was made a public issue through President John F. Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 and the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Then in 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was established. Over the last 40-plus years, this liberal, reform-oriented feminist organization has grown to include more than half a million members in its more than 500 chapters throughout the United States. It is the largest, although not the only, organized plank of the women's movement, and its philosophy represents one of a number of "feminisms" (Renzetti and Curran 2003; Lindsey 1997). Contemporary feminist positions range across a spectrum of perspectives, including liberal, socialist, radical, lesbian, multiracial, and postmodern feminism (Lorber 1998; Renzetti and Curran 1999). Each has a specific emphasis on issues and advocates different strategies to improve women's lives.

Judith Lorber sorts the various feminist perspectives into three broader categories: **Gender-reform feminism** is geared toward giving women the same rights and opportunities that men enjoy; **gender-resistant feminism** advocates more radical, separatist

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Understanding Yourself

Does the "F-word" Fit You?

Think about the material presented throughout this chapter. Clearly, women and men do not have identical experiences in families, as we continue to examine throughout this text. But we can probably all agree that gender matters in shaping what we do and don't experience in our relationships and our families, as well as in school, the workplace, and wider society. As you think about gender issues, ask yourself the following three questions, answering each one "Yes" or "No" (or agree/disagree):

1. Girls and women have not been treated as well as boys and men in our society.
2. Women and men should be paid equally for the same work.
3. Women's unpaid work (for example, housework and childcare) should be more socially valued.

How did you answer? Did you agree with (answer "Yes" to) one, two, or all three of the questions? Or did you answer "No" to all of them?

What can answers to the preceding items tell us? Together the three are used as measures or attitudinal indicators of feminist identification, in that they are among the "cardinal beliefs of feminism" (Zucker 2004). In other words, these items assess whether you agree with the most fundamental tenet of feminism: equality between the sexes. As conceptualized by researcher Alyssa Zucker, "feminists" would answer "Yes" to all three questions, demonstrating consistent agreement with feminist ideals.

Studying 333 alumnae from the University of Michigan (drawn from graduating classes of 1951 or 1952, 1972, and 1992) Zucker found the following:

- 4 women (1%) rejected all three beliefs
- 19 women (6%) rejected two of the three beliefs
- 81 women (24%) rejected one of the three beliefs
- 219 women (66%) accepted all three beliefs

Does this mean that two-thirds of this sample are feminists? Not so fast. The picture is about to become complicated. After all, we need to take into account how people perceive themselves. Think about yourself for the moment. How would you answer one last question:

4. Do you consider yourself a feminist?

This question measures your self-labeling or "acceptance of the feminist label." When Zucker asked this of her subjects (by having those who considered themselves feminist to complete certain other questions and those who didn't consider themselves feminist to proceed to others) 152 women, 46% of her sample, indicated that they saw themselves as feminists. Another 138 women, 41% of the sample, indicated that they did not identify themselves as feminists. Finally, 3% (11 women) could not decide whether they considered themselves feminists or not and 10% (32 women) didn't complete the questionnaire.

With both attitude and identification items in hand, Zucker determined that 123 of her subjects were feminists in that they agreed with all three items and considered themselves to be feminists. Interest-

strategies for women out of the belief that their subordination is too embedded in the existing social system; and **gender-rebellion feminism** tends to emphasize overlapping and interrelated inequalities of gender, sexual orientation, race, and class (Lorber 1998; Renzetti and Curran 1999).

Given this diversity of opinion, it is difficult to characterize *one* "feminist" position on families. Furthermore, such attempts occasionally exaggerate or simplify complex positions. In her critique of American feminism, for example, economist Sylvia Hewlett notes that neither liberal feminism ("equal rights" feminism) nor radical feminist positions have recognized the commitments women feel toward their families and the consequences of those commitments. By stressing equal rights and full equality with men, liberal feminism may have downplayed the responsibilities women carry within families and not recognized that women may need different supports than those needed by men (Hewlett 1986). Some of the more radical feminist positions articulated in the 1960s and 1970s may have been fairly anti-marriage or anti-motherhood, as either or both have at times been seen as relationships that oppress women and keep them from achieving their full capabilities.

Hewlett compares both approaches to a movement more characteristic of European feminist activity: **social feminism**—the belief that workplace and fam-

Table 4.2 ■ Age Effects among Study Subjects

Class of	Feminist (%)	Egalitarian (%)	Nonfeminist (%)
1951/1952	27	39	34
1972	51	30	19
1992	58	22	20

ingly, Zucker found that 84 women who endorsed all three feminist beliefs didn't consider themselves feminists (or couldn't choose). These are the people who might be heard in conversation to say, "I'm not a feminist but . . ." and then proceed to assert some point of view clearly in keeping with feminism. Zucker labeled them *egalitarians.* She found that 65 women were "nonfeminists" in that they rejected at least one of the cardinal beliefs of feminism and rejected the label. (The remaining women were not part of this analysis because of incomplete data or because despite disagreement with at least one feminist belief they considered themselves feminists.) This left the following percentage distribution in her sample:

45% feminists

31% egalitarians

24% nonfeminists

Zucker determined that there were some interesting age effects, as could be seen in the differences among the three subsamples:

Clearly, younger women were more likely than older women to consider themselves feminists. There were some other noteworthy differences within her sample. Feminists were significantly more likely than either egalitarians or nonfeminists to have feminist family members or to have had relationships with more feminists. They were also more likely than the other two groups to mention suffering, either personally or of someone close to them, the consequences of sexism.

What are we to make, however, of women who agree with feminism but distance themselves from the label? Zucker contends that feminism is a social identity that "is both concealable and often stigmatized or socially devalued, and thus public identity as a feminist is both optional and potentially costly." Given the understandable desire to avoid stigma and other social costs, perhaps it is even expected that women would understate or deny being what their attitudes suggest.

Questions to Consider

1. How well does the preceding discussion fit your answers to the questions?
2. What reasons can you think of for why someone who agrees with feminist ideals would reject or avoid the feminist label?
3. Why do you think "feminist" has negative connotations for some people?

SOURCE: Zucker 2004.

ily supports are essential if women are to experience a high quality of life (Hewlett 1986). Feminist critics of Hewlett rightly point out that the greatest activism on behalf of public support for families has and continues to come most strongly from women; thus, her characterization is said to be unfair. Although American feminists have been active at the forefront of pushing for parental leave, childcare, and so forth, organizations such as NOW still stress abortion rights, reproductive freedom, opposing bigotry against lesbians and gays, and ending violence against women more heavily than specifically family-focused issues.

Divisions of opinion and multiple perspectives on gender inequality constitute a basic similarity between women and men. Just as there is no one perspective on how women should be or what they should do, neither is there unanimity about men's lives. Just as there are multiple feminisms, each with its own agenda, there are different viewpoints on whether, in what direction, and how men ought to change (Clatterbaugh 1997; Messner 1997; Renzetti and Curran 1995).

In recent years, at one time or another, we have witnessed a variety of "men's movements": the mythopoeic men's movement, the men's rights and fathers' rights advocates, the Christian men's movement (for example, Promise Keepers), and the profeminist, gay-affirmative men's organization, the National Organization of Men Against Sexism. Each

represents just a part among many movements. Many of these movements differ in what they see as men's roles in and responsibilities to their families.

Central to a **profeminist men's movement** is the issue of *fairness.* Profeminist men believe that men ought to share responsibilities within their households and that women and men ought to be equal partners. Also, profeminists argue that men and children would both benefit from closer connections between fathers and their children.

Both the Promise Keepers and the organizers of the 1995 Million Man March and rally in Washington, D.C., by African American men also stressed the idea of men's responsibilities to their families, although their versions of responsibilities included more traditional notions of men's roles as the heads of their households. They also argued that men needed to be more accountable to spouses and children. Finally, the men's rights movement has stressed supposed discrimination that men face, in and out of family matters. They note, for example, that only men can be subject to compulsory military service. They also look at what they believe are inequalities in areas of divorce settlements and custody or visitation arrangements (Farrell 2001).

It is interesting to note the different positions taken on the family by the various feminist and men's movements. Although it is inaccurate and overstated to suggest that feminists are antifamily, the resurgent women's movement of the 1960s did grow partly out of the articulation of discontent. Similarly, early "second wave" feminists (1960s–1970s) attempted to sever the automatic connections typically made among women, children, and families as a way of liberating women to pursue other aspirations.

Conversely, across most men's movements there is a sense that men need to enlarge their family role, live up to or "honor" their commitments to their families, and/or share in caring for children and households. Such involvement is often seen as potentially "liberating" for men, because it reconnects them to their emotional sides and broadens their lives beyond wage earning.

Looked at more closely, these movements are really not as different as they seem. What feminists railed against was not the *family* but the *gendered family.* They were less antagonistic to what women felt toward and did in the family than what men did not. Because of the differential burden carried by women in households, family life imposed constraints on women's opportunities for outside involvements in ways it did not on men's. More recently, the various men's movements have acknowledged men's lack of involvement or weaker commitments and opposed defining men solely in terms of what they do away from the family.

Contemporary gender roles are still in flux. Few men or women are entirely egalitarian or traditional. Even those who are androgynous or who have egalitarian attitudes, especially males, may be more traditional in their behaviors than they realize. Few with egalitarian or androgynous attitudes, for example, divide all labor along lines of ability, interest, or necessity rather than gender. Also, marriages that claim to be traditional rarely have wives who submit to their husbands in all things. Among contemporary men and women, women find that their increasing access to employment puts them at odds with their traditional (and personally valued) role as mother. Women continue to feel conflict between their emerging equality in the workplace and their continued responsibilities at home. Within marriages and families, the greatest areas of gender inequality continue to be the division of housework and childcare. But change continues to occur in the direction of greater gender equality, and this equality promises greater intimacy and satisfaction for both men and women in their relationships.

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Summary

- A *gender role* is the role a person is expected to perform as a result of being male or female in a particular culture. *Gender-role stereotypes* are rigidly held and oversimplified beliefs that males and females possess distinct psychological and behavioral traits. *Gender identity* refers to the sense of being male or female.
- Men and women are not "opposites," they are actually more similar than different. Innate gender differences are generally minimal; differences are encouraged by socialization.
- Within any given society, there are multiple versions of masculinity and femininity, one of which comes to dominate our thinking about gender. Across societies, much variation exists in how gender is perceived, including the perception of how many gender categories there are.
- Gender relations are also power relations. *Patriarchal societies* are social structures in which men dominate. Logically, *matriarchal societies* would be societies in which women dominate political and economic life. Researchers have not found any society that truly embodies a matriarchal social structure.
- According to *gender theory,* social relationships are based on the socially perceived differences between males and females that justify unequal power relationships.
- Symbolic interactionists view gender as something we actively create or "do" in everyday situations and relationships, not an internalized set of behavioral and personal attributes.
- Two important socialization theories are social learning theory and cognitive development theory. *Social learning theory* emphasizes learning behaviors from others through rewards, punishments, and *modeling. Cognitive development theory* asserts that once children learn that gender is permanent, they independently strive to act like "proper" boys or girls because of an internal need for congruence.
- Parents, teachers, and *peers* (age-mates) are important agents of socialization during childhood and adolescence. Ethnicity and social class also influence gender roles. Among African Americans, strong women are important female role models.
- After many years of evidence showing how schools disadvantage female students, recent evidence indicates that males are lagging behind educationally.
- The media tend to portray traditional stereotypes of men and women, as well as of ethnic groups. For students, colleges and universities are important sources of gender-role learning, especially for nontraditional roles. Marriage, parenthood, and the workplace also influence the development of adult gender roles.
- The gender roles we play in adulthood are affected by situations, opportunities, and constraints, which can alter the path established by socialization.
- Traditional male roles emphasize dominance and work. For women, there is greater role diversity according to ethnicity.
- Contemporary gender roles are more *egalitarian* than the traditional ones of the past. They reflect: (1) the acceptance of women as workers and professionals; (2) increased questioning of motherhood as a core female identity; (3) greater equality in marital power; (4) the breakdown of the instrumental and expressive dichotomy; and (5) the expansion of male family roles.
- Changing gender-role behavior is often difficult because (1) each sex reinforces the traditional roles of its own and the other sex; (2) we evaluate ourselves in terms of fulfilling gender-role concepts; (3) gender roles have become an intrinsic part of ourselves and our roles; and (4) the social structure reinforces traditional roles.
- There have been various social movements dedicated to challenging or changing women's or men's roles, including various feminisms and various "movements" and perspectives on men and masculinity. Ironically, whereas early 1960s and 1970s feminists often rallied against women being associated with family responsibilities, most of the current men's movements attempt to reconnect men with families.

Key Terms

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