

# Essay 13

## Conventional Wisdom Tells Us . . . You've Come a Long Way, Baby

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*In the past 40 years, women have made great strides toward equality with men, but have they journeyed far enough? Here, we focus on gender relations in the home, the schools, and the workplace, illustrating the gains and losses faced by women and men in the current era.*

**D**rop in on any historical period—past or present—and chances are great that you will find a story filled with gender inequality:

- *Dareline, Preindustrial Europe*: Artisan guilds limit their apprenticeships to men, thereby ensuring the exclusion of women from the master crafts (Howell 1986).
- *The Shores of Colonial America*: Colonists adopt “the Doctrine of Coverture” from British common law, thus subsuming women’s legal identities and rights to those of their husbands (Blackstone 1765–1769/1979).
- *United States, circa 1870*: The “conservation of energy” theme is used to support the argument that education is dangerous for women. The development of the mind is thought to occur at the expense of the reproductive organs (Clarke 1873).

- *The State of Virginia, 1894*: In reviewing a case on a Virginia state regulation, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the word "person" is properly equated with "male," not "female." The decision upholds the state's decision to deny a law license to a "nonperson" female (Renzetti and Curran 1989).
- *Turn-of-the-century America*: Twenty-six U.S. states embrace the doctrine of "separate spheres" and pass laws prohibiting the employment of married women. The doctrine asserts that a woman's place is in the home, while a man's is in the public work sphere (Padavic and Reskin 2002; Skolnick 1991).
- *Sharpsburg, Maryland, 1989*: A female participant in a historical re-creation of the Civil War battle of Antietam is forced to leave the event. She was evicted by a park ranger who told her that women were not allowed to portray Civil War soldiers at reenactments.<sup>1</sup>
- *June 2007*: Former CBS news anchor Dan Rather criticized the network's 2006 hiring of Katie Couric. Rather contended that Couric's hiring was an attempt to "dumb down and tart up" the news to attract a younger audience.

"You've come a long way, baby." No doubt, you have heard this phrase used to acknowledge the dramatic change in women's social roles and achievements. Today, much has improved for women. Thousands of women have moved into traditionally male jobs. Marital status is no longer a legal barrier to the employment of women. Court rulings have struck down gender-based job restrictions. Women participate in higher education at rates equal to or greater than men, and the law has made concerted efforts to advance and protect the legal rights of women. Even the historical record is slowly but surely being corrected. Yet despite the long way that "baby" has traveled, a careful assessment of gender relations in the United States indicates that "baby" has a long haul ahead.

Obstacles to gender equality begin with gender socialization. Gender socialization refers to the process by which individuals learn the culturally approved expectations and behaviors for males and females. Even in a child's earliest moments of life, gender typing, with all its implications, proves to be a routine practice. Gender typing refers to gender-based expectations and behaviors. Several early studies documented parents' differential treatment of male and female infants. An observational study by Goldberg and Lewis (1969), for example, revealed mothers unconsciously rewarding and reinforcing passivity and dependency in girls while rewarding action and independence in boys. In another early study by Lake (1975), researchers asked 30 first-time parents to describe their newborn infants. The exercise revealed that parents' responses were heavily influenced by prominent gender stereotypes. Stereotypes are generalizations applied to all members of a group. Thus, daughters were most often described using such adjectives as "tiny," "soft,"

and "delicate." In contrast, boys were most frequently described with adjectives such as "strong," "alert," and "coordinated" (also see Karraker, Vogel, and Lake 1995; Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria 1974; and Sweeney and Bradbard 1988). Other studies on gender typing in infancy uncovered similar patterns. For example, when the infants were dressed in blue clothing and identified as boys, women participating in the study described the infant in masculine terms and engaged in more aggressive (bouncing and lifting) play. When the *very same* infants were dressed in pink and identified as girls, women participating in the study described the infants in feminine terms, handled them more tenderly, and offered the "girls" a doll (Bonner 1984; Will, Self, and Dalton 1976). Similarly, when asked to assess the crawling ability of their babies, mothers overestimated the ability of their sons and underestimated the ability of their daughters. In actual performance, infant boys and girls displayed identical levels of crawling ability (Mondschein, Adolph, and Tamis-LeMonda 2000). Gender typing in infancy is a widespread phenomenon. Even in Sweden, a society that actively promotes gender equality, there is nonetheless evidence of differential treatment of male and female infants by mothers (Heimann 2002).

Often, the gender typing of infants occurs in subtle ways. Several studies, for example, have focused on gender differences in vocalizations of both infants and parents. In one study, both mothers and fathers perceived their crying infant girls more negatively as the crying increased. Increased crying by sons, on the other hand, led their mothers to rate them as "more powerful" (Teichner, Ames, and Keriig 1997). Another study found that babies who "sounded" like boys (i.e., babies with less nasal vocalizations) received higher favorability ratings by adults (Bloom, Moore-Schoenmakers, and Masataka 1999)! And research has also documented that fathers sing more playfully and expressively to sons, while mothers do the same with daughters (Trehub, Hill, and Kamenetsky 1997). Gender typing can even occur in the realm of naming. In many traditional cultures (e.g., Iranian, Japanese, or Jewish), the naming of boys involves more elaborate public rituals than the naming of girls. These differences suggest that boys' identities are viewed as more central to the society's well-being. Following a similar logic, immigrant Hispanic couples are more likely to give sons Spanish names while giving daughters names with no Spanish referents, a practice that sends a very early message about the perceived keepers of family heritage (Sue and Telles 2007).

Gender typing is not restricted to the infancy period; it continues during the toddler years. Observation studies of parents and toddlers reveal that parents are rougher and more active with their sons than with their daughters. Studies also show that parents teach their toddlers different lessons

about independence. For example, fathers teach boys to “fend for themselves,” while encouraging daughters to “ask for help.” These distinctions occur even among parents who claim to use identical child-rearing techniques with their sons and daughters (Basow 1992; Lindsey and Mize 2001; Lips, 1993; Lytton and Romny 1991; Richardson 1988; Ross and Taylor 1989; Wilkin-Lanoil 1984). When toddlers play with other children, the gender typing continues. At the playground, for example, fathers’ supervision of sons is more lax than their supervision of daughters, suggesting different expectations with regard to risk-taking and injury (Kindleberger Hagan and Kuebi 2007). And daughters seem to model their parents’ fear and avoidance reactions to a greater degree than sons (Gerrill and Rapee 2002). When it comes time to discipline a toddler, gender typing remains. Misbehaviors from sons elicit anger from mothers while misbehaviors from daughters elicit disappointment. This is because mothers expect more risk-taking behaviors from sons but think there is less they can do to prevent it. (You know the old saying: Boys will be boys!) On the other hand, mothers think they can modify risk-taking behaviors among daughters (Morrongiello and Hogg 2004).

Of course, not all gender typing is quite so blatant. Studies show that parents of young children engage in more implicit gender scripting as well. In storytelling about their own pasts, for example, studies show that fathers tell stories with stronger autonomy themes than do mothers, and sons hear these stories more than daughters (Fiese and Skillman 2000). Research also suggests that the very presence of sons versus daughters can influence general family dynamics. Fathers invest more and are more likely to stay married in families that have sons. Mothers report greater marital happiness if they are in families with sons (Raley et al. 2006).

To be sure, parents are not the only family members to contribute to the process. Siblings are also involved in gender typing. Studies show that boys with older brothers and girls with older sisters engage in more gender-typed behaviors than children whose older siblings are of the opposite sex (Rust et al. 2000). Indeed, having an older sibling of the opposite sex can lead to different dynamics. For example, boys with older sisters are significantly less likely than those with older brothers to engage in deviant behavior (Carlat Mayer, Farrell, and Barnes 2005).

Children appear to learn their gender lessons well and early. In one study, toddlers were shown photos of male and female adults engaged in gender-stereotyped activities and gender-neutral activities. Toddlers as young as two years of age were able to identify “men’s work” and “women’s work” (Serbin, Poulin-Dubois, and Eichstedt 2002). Indeed, well before their third birthdays, children display knowledge of the ways in which familiar family

activities are gender stereotyped (Poulin-Dubois et al. 2002). That knowledge appears to get stronger with age. Preschool children prove quite aware of gender-typed competencies and occupations (Levy, Sadovsky, and Troseth 2000). In one study, children three to five years old predicted that their parents would be upset if they were to play with cross-gender toys. This finding was true even for children whose parents claimed to reject common gender stereotypes (Freeman 2007).

Of course, the gender typing of infants and toddlers is not confined to the family. From child care settings (Chick, Heilman-Houser, and Hunter 2002) to T-ball fields (Landers and Fine 2001), observation data document the prevalence of gender stereotyping. In peer play activities, girls are more likely to engage in pretend play, whereas boys are more likely to engage in physical play (Lindsey and Mize 2001). Young boys also seem particularly concerned about proper gender-typed behavior. When in the company of same-sex peers, boys are more likely than girls to present themselves as engaging in gender-appropriate play (Banerjee and Lintern 2000).

And, of course, no discussion of gender typing would be complete without a serious look at gender stereotypes in the media. The mass media contribute to gender inequality by prioritizing the male experience in explicit ways. While their numbers have grown over the years, women are still underrepresented in leading movie roles and in prime-time television programming. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of prime-time characters are men (Children Now 2004; Eschholz, Buffin, and Long 2002; Signorielli and Bacue 1999). Popular prime-time programs (e.g., *Desperate Housewives*, the *Law and Order* series, etc.) and reality shows (e.g., *Survivor* or *The Apprentice*) frequently reinforce negative stereotypes of women (Cuklanz and Moorri 2006; Lauzen, Dozier, and Cleveland 2006; Merskin 2007). Music videos also deliver clear gender scripts that reinforce traditional gender views (Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker 2005). Even television coverage of Olympic-level athletes reveals a strong gender bias. When analyzing media coverage of the 2000 Sydney games, researchers found that male athletes were characterized as more athletic and committed (and received more air time) than their female counterparts (Billings and Tyler Eastman 2002).

Television commercials present more of the same—despite the fact that women do most of the purchasing for the home, male characters outnumber females and gender stereotypes still fill prime-time commercial spots (Ganahl, Prinsen, and Netzley 2003). When men are shown doing domestic chores in commercials, they are inept or unsuccessful, thus reinforcing traditional gender scripts about housework (Scharrer, Kim, Lin, and Liu 2006). Commercials depicting female athletes emphasize their sex appeal rather than their athletic achievements (Carty 2005). Even commercials

directed at children continue to reinforce stereotypical gender roles. Both active characters and characters portrayed in occupational settings are more likely to be men (Davis 2003). The gender bias that fills the airwaves permeates other media venues as well. Ads in magazines geared toward women seem to be the worst offenders, overemphasizing female beauty products and presenting women in stereotypical roles (Lindner 2004; Smith 2006). And when magazines and marketers sell gender-neutral products such as computers or cell phones, they favor a hyper-feminine pitch: Don't use that phone for business—get it to keep in touch with the kids (Gannon 2007)!

The media give priority to males in subtle ways as well. One study challenged viewers to turn on their TV sets, close their eyes, flip through the channels, and note the gender of the first voice they heard on each station. With few exceptions, the voice turned out to be male, a trend suggesting that men are the appropriate gatekeepers of the airways (Atkin 1982; Courtney and Whipple 1983). A more recent study on commercial voice-over work suggests that this “flip and listen” challenge would yield similar results today. Although there has been an increase in female voice-overs in recent years, more than 70% are still male (Bartsch, Burnett, Diller, and Rankin-Williams 2000).

It is important to note that gender stereotypes seep beyond prime-time programming and adult-g geared media. Even clip art presents characters in gender-stereotyped ways (Milburn, Carney, and Ramirez 2001). Children's programming also retains a clear male bias. Such programs as the *Teletubbies* and *Barney* do advance some change in gender messages. Nevertheless, these shows still reinforce gender stereotypes for girls (Powell and Abels 2002). Cartoons, likewise, reinforce traditional gender scripts. Studies find that males are overrepresented in cartoons, which also portray female characters in stereotypical ways—acting fearful, romantic, polite, emotional, or motherly or restricted to the home (Klein, Shiffman, and Welka 2000; Leaper, Breed, Hoffman, and Perlman 2002). And when children's programming gets “serious,” gender typing does not. Studies focusing on educational science programs and educational software found that male characters outnumbered female characters two to one. When females did appear on the shows, they were seldom seen in the role of expert scientist. Rather, females were seen in supportive roles, such as apprentices, assistants, or pupils (Sheldon 2004; Steinke and Long 1996).

Network officials defend this imbalance in children's programming as a valid, indeed sensible, marketing call—nothing more. Marketing research shows that although girls will watch male-dominated shows, boys will not “cross over” to female-dominated programs. And because boys watch more TV than girls, networks bow to the preference of their male audience

members (Carter 1991). Perhaps marketing considerations help explain the imbalance found in video games as well. Recent studies of Nintendo, Sony PlayStation, and Sega Genesis games found that female characters are missing from most of these video games. When females are present, they are often portrayed in ways that reinforce the idea of women as sex objects or as victims of violence (Beasley and Strandley 2002; Dietz 1998).

Reviewing the places and ways in which gender typing occurs is important because such stereotypes have tangible and important outcomes. Gender stereotypes, for example, have resulted in strikingly different educational experiences for boys and for girls. Research documents that elementary and junior high school teachers give more attention and praise to male students. Furthermore, boys tend to dominate classroom communication and receive more support than girls do when working through intellectual problems (Chira 1992; Sadker and Sadker 1985, 1998; Thorne 1995). Social scientists contend that such differential treatment can have long-term consequences. Teacher response patterns send an implicit message that male efforts are more valuable than female efforts. More importantly, teachers' gender-driven responses also appear to perpetuate stereotypes of learning. Consider that gender stereotypes suggest that boys are more skilled at math and science than girls. Yet more than 100 studies document that during the elementary and middle school years, girls actually perform equal to or better than boys in math and science. Some suggest that the decline in girls' math skills and interest during the high school years occurs because teachers begin tracking boys and girls in drastically different directions. Teachers urge boys to value math and science skills, while girls are taught to devalue them (Feingold 1988; Hyde, Fememba, and Lamom 1990). Teacher bias appears to affect other subject areas as well. For example, research suggests that teacher bias may result in the overidentification of boys and the underidentification of girls with reading disabilities (Share and Silva 2003).

Of course, teachers are not the only factor here. Peer and family support also seem to influence boys' and girls' intellectual preferences and future aspirations. Girls with interests in the sciences, for example, enjoy less support from their friends than do their male counterparts. Yet such support appears to be essential for gifted female students contemplating a future in science (Stake and Nickens 2005). Parents contribute to the mix by perceiving sons as more competent in the sciences, and thus expecting more from them (Andre, Whigham, Hendrickson, and Chambers 1999; Bhanor and Jovanovic 2005; Brownlow, Jacobi, and Rogers 2000; Dai 2002). And students' own gender biases about their competencies influence their choice of education and career plans (Brownlow et al. 2000; Correll 2001; Guimond and Roussel 2001; Keller 2002).

Teachers,' parents,' and students' perceptions and actions have tangible costs. **Longitudinal data**—data collected at multiple points in time—show that 7th- and 10th-grade boys and girls have a similar liking for both math and science. But by the 12th grade, boys are more likely than girls to report enjoying math and science (U.S. Department of Education 1997). Gender differences in actual performance increase over time as well. A study of high-scoring male and female math students found that, despite a similar starting point in elementary school, the male students' math performance accelerated faster as years in school progressed (Freeman 2004; Leahy and Guo 2001). And to come full circle, such performance differences have been attributed to pedagogical approaches that are male-friendly rather than female-friendly (Strand and Mayfield 2000).

Given these dynamics, it should not surprise us to learn that junior high school students today express career interests that fall along traditional gender paths (Lupart and Cannon 2002). Furthermore, the lack of training in math and science also serves to keep females out of lucrative career paths in engineering and the sciences (Mitra 2002). While females earned 48% of all doctoral degrees in 2003–2004, they earned only 28% of the doctoral degrees in math and statistics; 28% of the degrees in the physical sciences, and 18% of the doctoral degrees in engineering (U.S. Department of Education 2006, Indicator 30). And consider some noteworthy developments in the area of computers. Male and female students appear equal in their access to and use of computers (Freeman 2004). Yet, in 2002, 86% of high school students who took the AP exam in computer science were males. In 2004, men earned 69% of the master's degrees and 78% of the doctoral degrees in computer/information sciences (U.S. Department of Education 2006, Table 30.2). Gender scripts and stereotypes surely play some role in this outcome.

Perhaps the most telling "lesson" regarding the relationship between gender and education, however, is that schooling leads to greater financial benefits for males than it does for females. For every level of educational attainment, median earnings for women are lower than those for men. In 2005, a male with a bachelor's degree or higher earned 23% more than a female with the same level of education (U.S. Department of Education 2007a, Indicator 20). In that same year, a female high school graduate's earnings were only slightly above the average earnings for a male with less than a ninth-grade education. Indeed, it takes a *college degree for a female worker* to exceed the average earnings of a *male with a high school diploma*. The gender gap in earnings grows still larger for those with graduate training. In 2005, American males (aged 25–64) with master's degrees had an average annual income of nearly \$87,500 per year, whereas females with the same amount of graduate training averaged just over \$50,600 per year.

Males (aged 25–64) with professional degrees had average earnings of more than \$144,000, while their female counterparts averaged under \$84,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006c, PINC-03). The lower financial returns of education for women are made more exasperating when one realizes that women are increasingly participating in advanced education. Since 1976, female enrollment in graduate schools has increased 112%. In 2005, 60% of those enrolled in graduate school were women (U.S. Department of Education 2007a, Indicator 9).

When boys and girls become men and women, they carry learned gender differences into the domestic sphere. Thus despite current rhetoric to the contrary, the division of labor on the domestic front is anything but equal. A recent Bureau of Labor study found that on an average day 84% of women and 64% of men report spending some time on household activities (cooking, cleaning, lawn care, etc). Women, however, regardless of marital status, spend more time on these activities: 2.7 hours a day for women versus 2.1 hours a day for men. If we restrict the focus exclusively to *housework*, then on an average day 52% of women versus 20% of men report doing some cleaning or laundry (U.S. Department of Labor 2007a). In recent years, there has been a narrowing of the gap between women's and men's contributions to housework. (In 2005, for example, women spent 2.27 hours on household activities versus 1.35 hours for men; U.S. Department of Labor 2006a). But this "advance" is attributed to the fact that women have been systematically cutting back on the number of hours they spend on housework (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson 2000). Interestingly, even traditionally liberal arenas such as "academic" households can't escape the gender scripts of housework: Female college professors do considerably more household work than their male colleagues, especially when they are married and have children (Sutor, Meacom, and Feld 2001). Finally, in addition to doing about 70% of the household chores (Bianchi et al. 2000), women also bear the primary responsibility for purchasing goods and services and managing family organization and schedules (Daly 2001; U.S. Department of Labor 2006a; Zimmerman, Haddock, Ziemba, and Rust 2001).

Most sociologists agree that the greatest strides toward gender equality have been made within the workplace. Despite such strides, however, the old industrial practice of separating work along gender lines continues. Sex segregation is common practice in many workplaces and within many occupations. Sex segregation in the work sphere refers to the separation of male and female workers by job tasks or occupational categories.

When it comes to women and work, it is very clear that sex segregation still thrives. Indeed you might be surprised to see how many common occupations are still "nontraditional" for women. Take a look at Table 13.1.

Table 13.1 A Sampling of Nontraditional Occupations for Women, 2006

Occupation	Percent Female
Chefs and Head Cooks	24%
Chief Executives	23%
Chiropractors	23%
Dentists	23%
Architects	22%
Couriers/messengers	19%
Taxi drivers and chauffeurs	16%
Parts salesperson	16%
Clergy	13%
Police patrol officers	13%
Truck drivers	5%
Construction workers	4%
Firefighters	4%
Surveying and mapping technicians	3%
Aircraft pilots	2%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. "Quick Facts on Nontraditional Occupations for Women," <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/nontra2006.htm>

NOTE: A nontraditional occupation is one in which women comprise 25% or less of total employment.

One of every three female workers can be found in "sales and office occupations" (U.S. Department of Labor 2007b). Ninety-one percent of registered nurses, 93% of receptionists, 94% of child care workers, 97% of secretaries, 98% of preschool and kindergarten teachers, and 99% of dental hygienists are female (U.S. Department of Labor 2006b). Table 13.2 lists the ten most prevalent occupations for women in 2006.

The histories of many female-dominated occupations suggest an economic motive for such segregation: Employers used female workers to reduce their wage costs. Employers were able to pay female workers lower wages than males. Employers also thought that women were less likely to be susceptible to the organizational efforts of unions. Furthermore, by confining their hiring to young, single women, employers ensured a high worker turnover in their businesses (young, single women left their jobs to marry), and thus a continuous supply of inexperienced, low-wage workers (Padavic and Reskin 2002).

We may be tempted to think that sex segregation can lead to certain positive outcomes. For example, an abundance of women within certain occupations suggests arenas of power born from numbers. However, it is important to note that there is a negative relationship between the percentage of female workers within an occupation and that occupation's earnings.

Table 13.2 The Ten Most Prevalent Female Occupations, 2006

Occupation	Number (in thousands)
1. Secretaries and administrative assistants	3,348,000
2. Registered nurses	2,309,000
3. Cashiers	2,291,000
4. Elementary and middle school teachers	2,220,000
5. Retail salespersons	1,740,000
6. Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	1,694,000
7. First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	1,436,000
8. Waitresses	1,401,000
9. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	1,364,000
10. Customer service representatives	1,349,000

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/20lead2006.htm>

NOTE: These figures are for full-time wage and salary workers.

Occupations dominated by women enjoy less pay, less prestige, and less power than occupations dominated by males. Female-dominated industries also fare less well on health insurance coverage than do male-dominated industries (Dewar 2000). Furthermore, once an occupation becomes female dominated, it is effectively abandoned by men.

The opposite trend—male displacement of female workers—is unusual (Padavic and Reskin 2002). Indeed, it is a trend typically limited to instances where immigrant men replaced native-born women, as they did in American textile mills or in the cigar-making industry (Hartman 1976; Kessler-Harris 2003). Men moving into female work has also occurred when there has been a compelling financial incentive. Title IX of the 1972 Higher Education Act, for instance, required salaries of college coaches of female teams to be brought in line with those for coaches of male teams. With this change, there was a marked increase in the number of men taking positions as coaches for women's collegiate programs (Padavic and Reskin 2002). Men in female-dominated professions (e.g., male librarians and nurses) can benefit from presumed leadership skills and careerist attitudes (Simpson 2004). In general, however, men have little motivation to enter lower paying, lower status, female-dominated occupations. Those who do are apt to encounter challenges to their masculinity and witness eventual wage erosion in the occupation (Caranzaric 2003; Cross and Bagilhole 2002; Simpson 2004).

In general, male workers dominate in relatively high-paying precision production, construction, repair, and protective service occupations. Only 6% of employed women are found in production, transportation, and material-moving occupations. Only 1% are found in natural resources, construction,

and maintenance occupations (U.S. Department of Labor 2006b, 2007b). In addition, the most prestigious professions are primarily the domains of men. Only 13% of aerospace engineers, 22% of architects, 23% of dentists, 32% of physicians and surgeons, and 33% of lawyers are female (U.S. Department of Labor 2006b). Women who enter nontraditional occupations are likely to face gender segregation within the occupation. For example, females in medicine are most likely to specialize in pediatrics or obstetrics and gynecology, while anesthesiology and radiology remain the preserve of male physicians (American Medical Association 2006). And in the last decade medical specialties dominated by women are finding it more and more difficult to recruit new residents (Blenstock and Laube 2005).

Women who enter nontraditional occupations are also underrepresented in leadership positions. Among physicians, for example, women make up 49% of graduating medical students and 42% of residents and fellows. Yet, they constitute only 16% of full professors and 11% of medical school deans (Association of American Medical Colleges 2006). Similar patterns are found in the legal profession. A recent study of Massachusetts lawyers found that while men and women enter law firms in equal numbers, women leave law firm practice at much higher rates than men. The primary reason for the departure: the conflict between maximizing billable hours for firms and attending to family needs (Harrington and Hsi 2007). The female exodus from law firms means that fewer women "make partner" and fewer women lawyers become judges, law school professors, and business executives (Pfeiffer 2007).

In professional occupations, men are much more likely than women to be in the highest paying professions (e.g., engineers and mathematical and computer scientists). Women are more likely to work in lower paying occupations, such as teaching. They also tend to take jobs that allow them to move into and out of the labor force in order to accommodate family needs. Such jobs tend to offer lower compensation (Day and Downs 2007; U.S. Department of Labor 2006c). The picture fails to brighten in service-oriented work. In the realm of real estate, for example, women sell homes, while men sell commercial properties (Thomas and Reskin 1990). (Guess which is the more lucrative branch of the field?) In the world of waiting tables, gender segregation persists as well. Expensive restaurants tend to hire waiters; inexpensive eateries and diners hire waitresses (Padavic and Reskin 2002). Even in the "work of God," sex segregation rules the day. Women clergy are overrepresented in low-status, subordinate congregational positions (Sullins 2000).

The gender segregation of jobs and occupations takes a financial toll on women. For example, in 2006, the median weekly earnings for full-time male workers averaged \$743; for female workers, weekly earnings averaged \$600 (U.S. Department of Labor 2007b). This disparity means that women

must work about 15 months to earn the 12-month wage of men. Such pay discrepancies are reflected in a statistic known as the **pay gap**. The pay gap refers to a ratio calculated when women's earnings are divided by men's earnings. Historically, a pay gap favoring men over women is a well-established tradition. Currently, the pay gap for the annual average of median weekly earnings is approximately 81—that is, for every \$10,000 paid the average male worker, the average female worker is paid around \$8,100. While the gap did narrow through the 1980s, it has been maintained over the last decade (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2007a). Furthermore, review of the Bureau of Labor statistics on weekly median earnings clearly shows the pay gap holds across virtually all occupations (U.S. Department of Labor 2006c, Table 18).

However, the pay gap can vary according to the age, race, and educational level of workers. For example, the gap increases when we compare the salaries of older female and male workers with those just entering the workforce. Females with professional degrees face a larger pay gap vis-à-vis their male counterparts (72%) than that found between female and male high school dropouts (75%; U.S. Department of Labor 2006c). Women hoping to improve their financial status should consider the jobs listed in Table 13.3. These jobs offered the highest median weekly earnings for full-time female workers in 2006.

Ironically, one area in which women do appear to be achieving equity is in the realm of disease and mortality. Traditionally, women have enjoyed a health advantage over men. Females display lower rates of infant mortality than males. Females enjoy longer life-spans than males. Male death rates

**Table 13.3** Top Ten Occupations with Highest Median Weekly Earnings for Full-time Female Workers, 2006

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Median Weekly Earnings</i>
1. Pharmacists	\$1,564
2. Chief executives	\$1,422
3. Lawyers	\$1,333
4. Computer and information systems managers	\$1,330
5. Physicians and surgeons	\$1,329
6. Computer software engineers	\$1,372
7. Physical therapists	\$1,086
8. Management analysts	\$1,069
9. Medical and health services managers	\$1,064
10. Computer scientists and systems analysts	\$1,039

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Quick Stats 2006. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/main.htm>



generally are higher than female death rates within all age categories. But as women embrace more of the behaviors traditionally associated with the male role (such as alcohol consumption and smoking), and as they make inroads into male occupations, their health advantage may be waning.

Consider smoking. Currently, smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. In 2005, 24% of men and 18% of women were smokers (Centers for Disease Control 2006b). Since 1984, the incidence rate for lung cancer has been *decreasing* for men but *increasing* for women, although as of 2007, the rate appears to have reached a plateau for women (see American Cancer Society 2007). Today lung cancer accounts for the largest number of cancer-related deaths in both men and women. The Surgeon General reports that smoking causes 80% of lung cancer deaths in women, a figure closing in on the 90% rate for men. The Surgeon General also notes that women's risk of cervical cancer increases with the duration of their smoking habit (Centers for Disease Control 2004a). Since 1987, more women have died from lung cancer than from breast cancer (American Cancer Society 2007).

Similarly, women's increased representation in the workforce has been linked to increases in female heart disease. Heart disease is now the leading cause of death for both men and women. One in three adult *females and males* suffer from some form of cardiovascular disease—known as CVD. CVD kills more than 480,000 women a year (American Heart Association 2006). Since 1984, the number of CVD deaths for females has exceeded those for males (American Heart Association 2007b).

Despite women's increasing representation in cancer and heart disease rates, several studies show that the female experience receives only secondary consideration by medical researchers. There is still a common perception, for instance, that heart disease is not a significant problem for women. Indeed only 13% of women themselves view heart disease as a health threat (American Heart Association 2007b). And although heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women, their medical treatment varies greatly. Physicians are less likely to counsel women about key risk factors and lifestyle changes relevant to heart disease. After the first heart attack, women are less likely to receive diagnostic, therapeutic, and rehabilitative procedures. Consequently women are more likely to die or suffer a second heart attack (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality 2005).

Clearly, the social and economic contexts of women's lives are related to their health and health care. During the 1990s, activists aggressively lobbied Congress to obtain a more equitable share of funding for women's health issues. A 2001 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report stressed the need for

research on the biological and physiological differences between men and women with regard to disease and medical practice and therapies (Institute of Medicine 2001). A similar agenda was forwarded in 2007 when the Office of Research on Women's Health called for studies to examine the ways in which health and disease processes may differ between men and women (Office of Research on Women's Health 2007). There is increasing recognition that gender equity is an essential part of health care policy reform (Moss 2002; Strobino, Grason, and Mikovitz 2002).

In general, women's health care reflects many of the gender stereotypes and discrepancies documented throughout this essay. To make this point clear, consider the ways in which the experience of pain differs by gender. *Gender scripts*—the articulation of gender norms and biases—are useful in this exercise. The nurturing and empathic roles supported by female gender scripts make women more likely to see pain in others. As a result women are more likely to acknowledge and experience pain themselves. In contrast, male gender scripts emphasize courage and strength. Hence men are slow to acknowledge pain to themselves and even slower to report pain to their doctors. Gender scripts even influence medical protocols on pain treatment. Because women are viewed as overly sensitive, women's pain has been taken less seriously by the medical community. As such, women who complain of pain are too often discounted (Wartik 2002).

It is often said that the longest journey begins with the first step. Women have taken that step, but their journey is far from complete. Perhaps the greatest evidence of the distance yet to be covered is found in the area of politics. Governorships, Senate seats, and House seats are noteworthy for their near absence of women. Only nine women currently serve as governors, and note that this is an all-time high. Only 86 of 535 seats in the 110th Congress are held by women—16 in the Senate and 70 in the House of Representatives (Center for American Women and Politics 2007). Is it any wonder, then, that in the summer of 2007, only 58% of Americans thought that the United States was ready to elect a female president (Newsweek Poll 2007)? Social psychologist Sandra Lipsitz Bem (1993) contends that the male dominance of political power has created a male-centered culture and social structure. Such an environment works to the clear advantage of men. A male-centered perspective on the world dictates a set of social arrangements that systematically meets the needs of men, while leaving women's needs unmet or handled as "special cases."

Witness, for instance, the influence of the male perspective within the legal arena: A case in point is the area of no-fault divorce laws. Such laws treat parties to a divorce as equal players despite their unequal work and occupational histories. Present social arrangements are such that a husband's



earning power is enhanced over the course of a marriage. Consequently, in the wake of no-fault divorce laws, ex-wives typically experience a decrease in their standard of living, while ex-husbands typically enjoy an increase (Peterson 1996). A male-centered perspective can also influence government labor policies and assistance programs. With regard to the unemployment insurance (UI) system, for example, note that many states exclude part-time workers from eligibility. Since women account for 70% of all part-time workers, such policies are particularly harsh on females (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2001). The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program has been criticized as well for forcing mothers to prioritize wage work (in low-paying female jobs) over child care responsibilities (Oliker 2000; Peterson 2002a). Indeed, family support and occupational segregation issues have been systematically neglected as critical elements to any welfare or workforce reform efforts (Jones-DeWeever, Peterson, and Song 2003). Finally, it is worth noting that women are disproportionately found in low-wage occupations. Such occupations are least likely to offer key employee benefits. Consider for instance that 57% of women in the ten largest low-wage occupations for women do not have any paid sick days; 47% of women working in the private sector also lack any paid sick days. Since women are still the primary caregivers in families, unpaid sick days put female workers in an untenable position when they have to meet their own or their families' health care needs (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2007b).

Male-centered social arrangements also permeate current disability policies. Such policies recognize nearly all "male" illnesses and medical procedures (circumcision, prostate surgery, and so on) as potentially eligible for compensation. In contrast, the female condition of pregnancy is defined as a "special condition" unique to women and therefore ineligible for coverage. In essence, models or standards of normalcy and behavior are male oriented, a situation that automatically puts women at a disadvantage (Ben 1993; Crocker 1985).

By increasing their numbers and voice in the political arena, women may achieve an effective "check" on social inequality. In recent years, women have made important strides in the area of voter turnout: In every presidential election since 1980, the percentage of female voters exceeded the percentage of male voters. Indeed in 2006 female votes were critical in shifting control of the U.S. Senate back to the Democrats (Center for American Women and Politics 2007). Without these kinds of developments, it will remain far too easy to sustain policies and practices that disadvantage women. Gender inequality will continue to be business as usual.

### Learning More About It

For an extensive collection of articles on gender (as well as race and class) in the media, see Gail Dines and Jean Humez's edited volume, *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Text-Reader* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003).

An interesting and provocative discussion of gender inequality is offered by social psychologist Sandra Lipsitz Bem in *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

In *Mismatch: The Growing Gulf Between Women and Men* (New York: Scribner, 2003a), Andrew Hacker examines the widening divide between men and women as evidenced in marriage patterns, divorce trends, career paths, politics, and so on.

A very readable and interesting discussion of the working woman's disproportional domestic duties is offered by Arlie Russell Hochschild (with Anne Machung) in *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Penguin, 2003b).

Irene Padavic and Barbara Reskin have constructed a very readable review of gender and its relationship to work. Readers can consult *Women and Men at Work*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2002).

Three recent *Annual Review of Sociology* articles should help the reader become well-grounded in individual and organizational-level approaches to understanding sex inequality in the workplace: Barbara Reskin, Debra McBrier, and Julie Kmec's "The Determinants and Consequences of Workplace Sex and Race Composition" (*Annual Review of Sociology* 25:335–361, 1999), Barbara Reskin's "Getting It Right: Sex and Race Inequality in Work Organizations" (*Annual Review of Sociology* 26:707–709, 2000), and Tanja van der Lippe and Liset van Dijk's "Comparative Research on Women's Employment" (*Annual Review of Sociology* 28:221–241, 2002).

The following organizations can also help you learn more about gender relations in society:

Center for American Women and Politics  
<http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>

Institute for Women's Policy Research  
<http://www.iwpr.org>

(Click the link for "The Status of Women in the States" to see how each of the 50 states ranks on indicators such as political participation, earnings, health and well-being, social autonomy, etc. FYI: The top three states [overall] for women are Vermont, Connecticut, and Minnesota. The single worst state for women is Mississippi.)

Society for Women's Health Research  
<http://www.womenshealthresearch.org/site/PageServer>

## Exercises

1. Using your own experiences and the experiences of friends and classmates, construct a list of paying jobs typically performed by adolescent boys and girls. Be sure to note the activities, duration, and rate of pay that normally characterize these jobs. Discuss the anticipatory socialization (see Essay 6) implications of your findings.
2. Using your college catalog, examine the gender distribution across the various academic departments and administrative levels. Note the total number and percentage of female faculty and administrators. Are women equally likely to appear in all fields and levels of work? Within specific fields and departments, is there any evidence of job-level segregation? (For example, are women more likely to occupy adjunct or assistant professor positions?) Review some recent course registration materials and see whether there is any pattern to the courses assigned to female faculty. Are your findings consistent with the image projected by your institution in its promotional materials?
3. Observe parents with small children in some public setting. Identify 5 to 10 gender lessons being provided by the nonverbal exchanges you observe.
4. Visit the Institute for Women's Policy Research Web site and review the information found via the "Status of Women in the States" link. Do you think that the indicators for assessing the status of women are reasonable ones? Are there areas or issues of life that are overlooked or slighted? Would the same indicators work for assessing the status of men?

## Note

1. In fact, more than 250 women fought on both sides of the Civil War; 5 women died at the battle of Antietam (Marcus 2002).

# Essay 14

## Conventional Wisdom Tells Us . . . America Is the Land of Equal Opportunity

*In the United States a level playing field for all Americans despite race? In this essay, we review the many arenas of continued segregation and racism in America. Furthermore, we explore the basis for determining one's race, noting that with all of the implications the classification holds, categorizing race is, at best, a tenuous process.*

In 2007, the Pulitzer Prize in History went to *The Race Beat*—a book documenting journalists' role in the civil rights movement. The book was 16 years in the making, and the authors, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, attribute that fact to the complexity of the story (Online Newshour 2007; Roberts and Klibanoff 2006). To be sure, issues of race in America are extraordinarily complex. Some recent news events drive this point home. Consider the 2007 controversy involving popular radio personality Don Imus. (Popular may be an understatement, as Imus was once listed among the 25 most influential people in America and remains a member of the National Broadcaster Hall of Fame.) On his April 4, 2007, broadcast, Imus banttered about the NCAA women's basketball championship. During his comments, he referred to players on the Rutgers women's basketball team as "nappy-headed hos."

*To our mothers . . .*

*Mary Ruane, a much treasured and loved source  
of second thoughts and knowledge*

*Lina Cerulo, who convinced the men in the family  
that girls deserved a college education too*

# SECOND THOUGHTS

Seeing Conventional  
Wisdom Through  
the Sociological Eye

4<sup>th</sup>  
edition

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