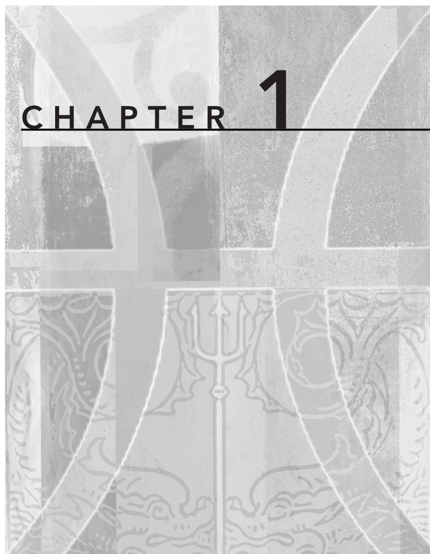

CHAPTER 1

All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women should be collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different from all other subject classes, that their masters require something more from them than actual service. Men do not want solely the obedience of women, they want their sentiments.

—John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869)

THE SOCIOLOGY OF GENDER

Theoretical Perspectives and Feminist Frameworks

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Events during the first decade of the millinnium have profoundly affected gender roles. The study of gender emerged as one of the most important trends in the discipline of sociology in the twentieth century. The research and theory associated with studying gender issues propelled the sociology of gender from the margins to become a central feature of the discipline. To understand the powerful social effects of the *Millennium Recession* (MR) and patterns of globalization, for example, sociological analysis must account for gender. This text documents how sociologists have aided our understanding of the influence of gender in shaping our lives, our attitudes, and our behavior. This understanding is enhanced by investigating the links between sociology and other disciplines and by integrating key concepts such as race, social class, and sexuality to clarify gender relations. Sociology is interested in how human behavior is shaped by group life. Although all group life is ordered in a variety of ways, gender is a key component of the ordering. An explosion of

research on gender issues now suggests that all social interactions, and the institutions in which the interactions occur, are gendered in some manner. Accounting for this gendering has reshaped the theoretical and empirical foundations of sociology. On the theoretical side, gender awareness has modified existing sociological theory and led to the creation of a new feminist paradigm. On the empirical side, gender awareness has led to innovative research strategies and opened up new topics for sociological inquiry. We open with an examination of basic concepts and theories that lay the groundwork for our sociological journey into gender roles.

BASIC SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

All societies are structured around relatively stable patterns that establish how social interaction will be carried out. One of the most important social structures that organizes social interaction is **status**—a category or position a person occupies that is a significant determinant of how she or he will be defined and treated. We acquire statuses by achievement, through our own efforts, or by ascription, being born into them or attaining them involuntarily at some other point in the life cycle. We occupy a number of statuses simultaneously, referred to as a **status set**, such as mother, daughter, attorney, patient, employee, and passenger. Compared to achieved statuses occurring later in life, ascribed statuses are those immediately impacting virtually every aspect of our lives. The most important ascribed statuses are gender, race, and social class. Since a status is simply a position within a social system, it should not be confused with rank or prestige. There are high-prestige statuses as well as low-prestige statuses. In the United States, for example, a physician occupies a status ranked higher in prestige than a secretary. All societies categorize members by status and then rank these statuses in some fashion, thereby creating a system of **social stratification**. People whose status sets are comprised of low-ranked ascribed statuses more than high-ranked achieved statuses are near the bottom of the social stratification system and vulnerable to social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. To date, there is no known society in which the status of female is consistently ranked higher than that of male.

A **role** is the expected behavior associated with a status. Roles are performed according to social **norms**, shared rules that guide people's behavior in specific situations. Social norms determine the privileges and responsibilities a status possesses. Females and males, mothers and fathers, and daughters and sons are all statuses with different normative role requirements attached to them. The status of mother calls for expected roles involving love, nurturing, self-sacrifice, home-making, and availability. The status of father calls for expected roles of breadwinner, disciplinarian, home technology expert, and ultimate decision maker in the household. Society allows for a degree of flexibility in acting out roles, but in times of rapid social change, acceptable role limits are often in a state of flux, producing uncertainty about what appropriate role behavior should be. People may experience *anomie*—normlessness—because traditional norms have changed but new ones have yet to be developed. For example, the most important twentieth-century trend impacting gender roles in the United Sates is the massive increase of women in the labor force. Although women from all demographic categories contributed to these numbers, mothers with preschool children led the trek from unpaid home-based roles to full-time paid employment roles. In acting out the roles of mother and employee, women

are expected to be available at given times to satisfy the needs of family and workplace. Because workplaces and other social institutions have not been modified in meaningful ways to account for the new statuses women occupy, their range of acceptable role behavior is severely restricted. As a result, family and workplace roles inevitably collide and compete with one another for the mother–employee's time and attention.

Key Concepts for the Sociology of Gender

As key components of social structure, statuses and roles allow us to organize our lives in consistent, predictable ways. In combination with established norms, they prescribe our behavior and ease interaction with people who occupy different social statuses, whether we know these people or not. There is an insidious side to this kind of predictable world. When normative role behavior becomes too rigidly defined, our freedom of action is often compromised. These rigid definitions are associated with the development of **stereotypes—**oversimplified conceptions that people who occupy the same status group share certain traits in common. Although stereotypes can include positive traits, they most often consist of negative ones that are then used to justify discrimination against members of a given group. The statuses of male and female are often stereotyped according to the traits they are assumed to possess by virtue of their biological makeup. Women are stereotyped as flighty and unreliable because they possess uncontrollable raging hormones that fuel unpredictable emotional outbursts. The assignment of negative stereotypes can result in **sexism**, the belief that the status of female is inferior to the status of male. Males are not immune to the negative consequences of sexism, but females are more likely to experience it because the status sets they occupy are more stigmatized than those occupied by males. Compared to males, for example, females are more likely to occupy statuses inside and outside their homes that are associated with less power, less prestige, and less pay or no pay. Beliefs about inferiority due to biology are reinforced and then used to justify discrimination directed toward females.

Sexism is perpetuated by systems of **patriarchy**, male-dominated social structures leading to the oppression of women. Patriarchy, by definition, exhibits **androcentrism—**male-centered norms operating throughout all social institutions that become the standard to which all persons adhere. Sexism is reinforced when patriarchy and androcentrism combine to perpetuate beliefs that gender roles are biologically determined and therefore unalterable. For example, throughout the developing world beliefs about a woman's biological unsuitability for other than domestic roles have restricted opportunities for education and achieving literacy. These restrictions have made men the guardians of what has been written, disseminated, and interpreted regarding gender and the placement of men and women in society. Until recently, history has been recorded from an androcentric perspective that ignored the other half of humanity (Chapter 5). This perspective has perpetuated the belief that patriarchy is an inevitable, inescapable fact of history, so struggles for gender equality are doomed to failure. Women's gain in education is associated with the power to engage in the research and scholarship offering alternatives to prevailing androcentric views. We will see that such scholarship suggests that patriarchal systems may be universal, but they are not inevitable, and that gender egalitarianism was a historical fact of life in some cultures and is a contemporary fact of life in others.

Distinguishing Sex and Gender

As gender issues have become more mainstreamed in scientific research and media reports, confusion associated with the terms *sex* and *gender* has decreased. In sociology, these terms are now fairly standardized to refer to different content areas. **Sex** refers to the biological characteristics distinguishing male and female. This definition emphasizes male and female differences in chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, reproductive systems, and other physiological components. **Gender** refers to those social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts. Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned.

This relatively simple distinction masks a number of problems associated with its usage. It implies that all people can be conveniently placed into unambiguous "either–or" categories. Certainly the ascribed status of sex is less likely to be altered than the achieved status of gender. Some people believe, however, that they were born with the "wrong" body and are willing to undergo major surgery to make their gender identity consistent with their biological sex. **Sexual orientation**, the preference for sexual partners of one gender (sex) or the other, also varies. People who experience sexual pleasure with members of their own sex are likely to consider themselves masculine or feminine according to gender norms. Others are born with ambiguous sex characteristics and may be assigned one sex at birth but develop a different identity related to gender. Some cultures allow people to move freely between genders, regardless of their biological sex.

These issues will be addressed fully in Chapters 2 and 3, but are mentioned here to highlight the problems of terminology. From a sociological perspective, this text is concerned with gender and how it is learned, how it changes over time, and how it varies between and within cultures. Gender can be viewed on a continuum of characteristics demonstrated by a person regardless of the person's biological sex. Adding the concept of role to either sex or gender may increase confusion in terminology. When the sociological concept of role is combined with the biological concept of sex, there is often misunderstanding about what content areas are subsumed under the resultant *sex role* label. Usage is becoming rapidly standardized, however, and most sociologists now prefer to employ the term *gender role* rather than *sex role* in their writing. **Gender roles**, therefore, are the expected attitudes and behaviors a society associates with each sex. This definition places gender squarely in the sociocultural context.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER ROLES

Sociologists explain gender roles according to several *theoretical perspectives*, general ways of understanding social reality that guide the research process and provide a means for interpreting the data. In essence, a **theory** is an explanation. Formal theories consist of logically interrelated propositions that explain empirical events. For instance, data indicate that compared to men, women are more likely to be segregated in lower-paying jobs offering fewer opportunities for professional growth and advancement. Data also indicate that both in the United States and cross-culturally the domestic work of women performed in or near their homes is valued less than the work of men performed outside their homes. Because the issue of gender crosses many disciplines, explanations for these facts can be offered according to the theoretical perspectives of those disciplines. Biology, psychology,

and anthropology all offer explanations for gender-related attitudes and behavior. Not only do these explanations differ between disciplines, but scientists within the same discipline also frequently offer competing explanations for the same data, and sociology is no exception. The best explanations are those that account for the volume and complexities of the data. As research on gender issues accelerates and more sophisticated research tools are developed, it is becoming clearer that the best explanations are also those that are both interdisciplinary and incorporate concepts related to diversity. Sociological theory will dominate this text's discussion, but we will also account for relevant interdisciplinary work and its attention to diversity issues.

Sociological perspectives on gender also vary according to the level of analysis at which they operate. *Macrosociological* perspectives on gender roles direct attention to data collected on large-scale social phenomena, such as labor force, educational, and political trends that are differentiated according to gender roles. *Microsociological* perspectives on gender roles direct attention to data collected in small groups and the details of gender interaction occurring, for example, between couples and in families and peer groups. Microsociological perspectives overlap a great deal with the discipline of social psychology (Chapter 3). We will see that theoretical perspectives may be differentiated according to macro- and microlevel of analysis, and perspectives from each level may be more or less compatible. When theoretical perspectives can be successfully combined, they offer excellent ways to better understand gender issues from a sociological perspective.

Early sociological perspectives related to gender roles evolved from scholarship on the sociology of the family. These explanations centered on why men and women hold different roles in the family that in turn impact the roles they perform outside the family. To a large extent, this early work on the family has continued to inform current sociological thinking on gender roles. The next sections will overview the major sociological perspectives and highlight their explanations regarding the gender–family connection.

Functionalism

Functionalism, also known as "structural functionalism," is a macrosociological perspective that is based on the premise that society is made up of interdependent parts, each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole society. Functionalists seek to identify the basic elements or parts of society and determine the functions these parts play in meeting basic social needs in predictable ways. Functionalists ask how any given element of social structure contributes to overall social stability, balance, and equilibrium. They assert that in the face of disruptive social change, society can be restored to equilibrium as long as built-in mechanisms of social control operate effectively and efficiently. Social control and stability are enhanced when people share beliefs and values in common. Functionalist emphasis on this value consensus is a major ingredient in virtually all their interpretations related to social change. Values surrounding gender roles, marriage, and the family are central to functionalist assertions regarding social equilibrium.

Preindustrial Society. Functionalists suggest that in preindustrial societies social equilibrium was maintained by assigning different tasks to men and women. Given the hunting and gathering and subsistence farming activities of most preindustrial societies, role specialization according to gender was considered a functional necessity. In their assigned hunting roles, men were frequently away

from home for long periods and centered their lives around the responsibility of bringing food to the family. It was functional for women—more limited by pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing—to be assigned domestic roles near the home as gatherers and subsistence farmers and as caretakers of children and households. Children were needed to help with agricultural and domestic activities. Girls would continue these activities when boys reached the age when they were allowed to hunt with the older males. Once established, this functional division of labor was reproduced in societies throughout the globe. Women may have been farmers and food gatherers in their own right, but they were dependent on men for food and for protection. Women's dependence on men in turn produced a pattern in which male activities and roles came to be more valued than female activities and roles.

Contemporary Society. Similar principles apply to families in contemporary societies. Disruption is minimized, harmony is maximized, and families benefit when spouses assume complementary, specialized, nonoverlapping roles (Parsons and Bales, 1955; Parsons, 1966). When the husband–father takes the **instrumental role**, he is expected to maintain the physical integrity of the family by providing food and shelter and linking the family to the world outside the home. When the wife–mother takes the **expressive role**, she is expected to cement relationships and provide emotional support and nurturing activities that ensure the household runs smoothly. If too much deviation from these roles occurs, or when there is too much overlap, the family system is propelled into a state of imbalance that can threaten the survival of the family unit. Advocates of functionalist assumptions argue, for instance, that gender role ambiguity regarding instrumental and expressive roles is a major factor in divorce (Hacker, 2003).

Critique. It should be apparent that functionalism's emphasis on social equilibrium contributes to its image as an inherently conservative theoretical perspective. This image is reinforced by its difficulty in accounting for a variety of existing family systems and in not keeping pace with rapid social change moving families toward more egalitarian attitudes regarding gender roles.

Often to the dismay of the scientists who developed them, scientific theories and the research on which they are based are routinely employed to support a range of ideologies. Functionalism has been used as a justification for male dominance and gender stratification. In the United States, functional analyses were popularized in the 1950s when, weary of war, the nation latched onto a traditional and idealized version of family life and attempted to establish not just a prewar, but a pre-Depression, existence. Functionalism tends to support a white middle-class family model emphasizing the economic activities of the male household head and domestic activities of his female subordinate. Women function outside the home only as a reserve labor force, such as when their labor is needed in wartime. This model does not apply to poor women and single parents who by necessity must work outside the home to maintain the household. It may not apply to African American women, who are less likely by choice to separate family and employment and who derive high levels of satisfaction from both these roles.

Research also shows that specialization of household tasks by gender in contemporary families is more dysfunctional than functional. Women relegated to family roles that they see as restrictive, for example, are unhappier in their marriages and more likely to opt out of them. Despite tension associated with multiple roles and role overlap, couples report high levels of gratification, self

esteem, status security, and personally enriched lives (Chapter 8). Contemporary families simply do not fit functionalist models.

To its credit, functionalism offers a reasonably sound explanation for the origin of gender roles and demonstrates the functional utility of assigning tasks on the basis of gender in subsistence economies or in regions in which large families are functional and children are needed for agricultural work. Contemporary functionalists also acknowledge that strain occurs when there is too sharp a divide between the public and the private sphere (work and family), particularly for women. They recognize that such a divide is artificial and dysfunctional when families need to cope with the growing interdependence called for in a global economy. The "superwoman" who "does it all" in career achievement and family nurturance will be valued (Diekman and Goodfriend, 2006). Finally, neofunctionalism accounts for the multiple levels where gender relations are operative—biological, psychological, social, and cultural. A functionalist examination of their interdependence allows us to understand how female subordination and male superiority became reproduced throughout the globe.

Conflict Theory

With its assumptions about social order and social change, the macrosociological perspective of conflict theory, also referred to as social conflict theory, is in many ways a mirror image of functionalism. Unlike functionalists, who believe that social order is maintained through value consensus, conflict theorists assert that it is preserved involuntarily through the exercise of power one social class holds over another.

Marx, Engels, and Social Class. Originating from the writings of Karl Marx (1818–1883), conflict theory is based on the assumption that society is a stage on which struggles for power and dominance are acted out. The struggles are largely between social classes competing for scarce resources, such as control over the means of production (land, factories, natural resources), and for a better distribution of all resources (money, food, material goods). Capitalism thrives on a class-based system that consolidates power in the hands of a few men of the ruling class (*bourgeoisie*), who own the farms and factories that workers (*proletariat*) depend on for their survival. The interest of the dominant class is to maintain its position of power over the subordinate class by extracting as much profit as possible from their work. Only when the workers recognize their common oppression and form a *class consciousness* can they unite and amass the resources necessary to seriously challenge the inequitable system in which they find themselves (Marx and Engels, 1964; Marx, 1967). Marxian beliefs were acted out historically in the revolution that enveloped Russia, Eastern Europe, and much of Eurasia, propelling the Soviets to power for a half a century of control over these regions.

Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), Marx's collaborator, applied these assumptions to the family and, by extension, to gender roles. He suggested that the master–slave or exploiter–exploited relationships occurring in broader society between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are translated into the household. Primitive societies were highly egalitarian because there were no surplus goods, hence no private property. People consumed what they produced. With the emergence of private property and the dawn of capitalistic institutions, Engels argued that a woman's domestic labor is "no longer counted beside the acquisition of the necessities of life by the man; the latter was everything, the former an unimportant

extra." The household is an autocracy, and the supremacy of the husband is unquestioned. "The emancipation of woman will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large social scale, and domestic work no longer claims but an insignificant amount of her time" (Engels, 1942:41–43).

Contemporary Conflict Theory. Later conflict theorists refined original Marxian assertions to reflect contemporary patterns and make conflict theory more palatable to people who desire social change that moves in the direction of egalitarianism but not through the revolutionary means outlined by classical Marxism (Dahrendorf, 1959; Collins, 1975, 1979). Today conflict theory largely asserts that social structure is based on the dominance of some groups over others and that groups in society share common interests, whether its members are aware of it or not. Conflict is not simply based on class struggle and the tensions between owner and worker or employer and employee; it occurs on a much wider level and among almost all other groups. These include parents and children, husbands and wives, young and the old, sick and healthy, people of color and whites, heterosexual and gay, females and males, and any other groups that can be differentiated as minority or majority according to the level of resources they possess. The list is infinite.

Gender and the Family. Conflict theory focuses on the social placement function of the family that deposits people at birth into families who possess varying degrees of economic resources. People fortunate enough to be deposited into wealthier families will work to preserve existing inequality and the power relations in the broader society because they clearly benefit from the overall power imbalance. Social class *endogamy* (marrying within the same class) and inheritance patterns ensure that property and wealth are kept in the hands of a few powerful families. Beliefs about inequality and the power imbalance become institutionalized—they are accepted and persist over time as legitimate by both the privileged and the oppressed—so the notion that family wealth is deserved and that those born into poor families remain poor because they lack talent and a work ethic is perpetuated. The structural conditions that sustain poverty are ignored. When social placement operates through patriarchal and patrilineal systems, wealth is further concentrated in the hands of males and further promotes female subservience, neglect, and poverty. Contemporary conflict theorists agree with Engels by suggesting that when women gain economic strength by also being wage earners, their power inside the home is strengthened and can lead to more egalitarian arrangements.

The conflict perspective is evident in research demonstrating that household responsibilities have an effect on occupational location, work experience, and number of hours worked per week, all of which are linked to the gender gap in earnings (Chapter 10). Undesirable work will be performed disproportionately by those lacking resources to demand sharing the burden or purchasing substitutes. Because household labor is unpaid and associated with lack of power, the homemaker (wife) takes on virtually all domestic chores (Lindsey, 1996a; Riley and Kiger, 1999). The more powerful spouse performs the least amount of household work.

Critique. Conflict theory has been criticized for its overemphasis on the economic basis of inequality and its assumption that there is inevitable competition between family members. It tends to dismiss the consensus among wives and husbands regarding task allocation. In addition, paid employment is not the

panacea envisioned by Engels in overcoming male dominance. The gendered division of household labor does not translate to significant wage reductions for employed women outside the home or reduced in-home responsibilities (Tichenor, 2005; Lincoln, 2008). In the former Soviet Union women had the highest levels of paid employment in the world, but retained more household responsibilities than comparable women in other countries, and earned two-thirds of the average male income. In post–Communist Russia, there is no change in women's domestic work, but women now earn less than half of men's average earnings (Chapter 6). Research unanimously concludes that even in those cultures where gender equity in the workplace is increasing, employed women globally take on a "second shift" of domestic work after returning home (Chapter 8).

A conspiratorial element emerges when conflict theory becomes associated with the idea that men as a group are consciously organized to keep women in subordinate positions. A number of social forces, many of them unorganized or unintended, come into play when explaining gender stratification. Functionalism's bias against social change might be matched with conflict theory's bias for social change. Compared to functionalism, however, this bias is less of a problem for conflict theory once it is stripped of some Marxian baggage. Contemporary conflict theory has made strong inroads in using social class to further clarify the gender–race–class link, suggesting that the class advantages for people of color may override the race disadvantages (Gimenez, 2001; Lareau, 2002; Misra, 2002). Most people are uncomfortable with sexism and patterns of gender stratification that harm both women and men. Women are denied opportunities to expand instrumental roles offering economic parity with men outside the home; men are denied opportunities for expanding expressive and nurturing roles inside the home. At the ideological level, sociological conflict theory has been used to support activities designed to reduce racism, economic-based disparity (classism), and sexism.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction, also called "the interactionist perspective," is at the heart of the sociological view of social interaction at the microlevel. With attention to people's behavior in face-to-face social settings, symbolic interactionists explain social interaction as a dynamic process in which people continually modify their behavior as a result of the interaction itself. Herbert Blumer (1900–1987), who originated the term *symbolic interaction*, asserted that people do not respond directly to the world around them, but to the meaning they bring to it. Society, its institutions, and its social structure exist—that is, social reality is bestowed—only through human interaction (Blumer, 1969). Reality is what members agree to be reality.

People interact according to how they perceive a situation, how they understand the social encounter, and the meanings they bring to it. Another important step in the interaction process involves how they think other people who are part of the interaction also understand the encounter. Each person's definition of the situation influences others' definitions. To illustrate symbolic interaction's emphasis on the fluidity of behavior, I developed the concept of the **end point fallacy**, asserting that the negotiation of social reality is an ongoing process in which new definitions produce new behavior in a never-ending cycle. The end point fallacy is an excellent way to explain the inconsistencies between people's behavior as they move from setting to setting.

Social Construction of Reality. Symbolic interaction is a microlevel perspective, but it does take into account that social interaction is a process governed by norms that are largely determined by culture. Cultural norms offer general guidelines for role behavior, but symbolic interactionists assert that we have latitude in the way we act out our roles. The context of the interaction is usually a key determinant of role performance. What is appropriate role performance in one context may be inappropriate in another. Cultural norms are modified whenever social interaction occurs because people bring their own definitions about appropriate behavior to the interaction. These definitions shape the way people see and experience the world. Symbolic interactionists refer to this shaping process as the **social construction of reality**—the shaping of perception of reality by the subjective meanings brought to any experience or social interaction. Consistent with Herbert Blumer's view, every time social interaction occurs, people creatively construct their own understanding of it—whether "real" or not—and behave accordingly.

Doing Gender. Symbolic interactionists contend that concepts used to collectively categorize people—such as race, ethnicty, and gender—do not exist objectively but emerge through a socially constructed process. People called "females" or "males" are endowed with certain traits defined as feminine or masculine. Concepts such as gender, therefore, must be found in the meanings people bring to them (Denzin, 1993; Deutscher and Lindsey, 2005:5). Gender emerges not as an individual attribute but something that is "accomplished" in interaction with others. People, therefore, are **doing gender** (Fenstermaker and West, 2002). In "doing" gender, symbolic interaction takes its lead from Erving Goffman (1922–1982), who developed a **dramaturgy** approach to social interaction. Goffman maintained that the best way to understand social interaction is to consider it as an enactment in a theatrical performance. Like actors on a stage, we use strategies of impression management, providing information and cues to others that present us in a favorable light (Goffman, 1959, 1963, 1971).

Think about the heterosexual bar scene where men usually sit at the counter and operate from a script where they are expected to make the first move. If a woman is with friends, she must disengage herself if she is "selected" by the man. It is probable that the women drove separately. Data from television also illustrate these concepts. Prime time television commonly depict traditionally scripted sexual encounters according to gender and beliefs about heterosexuality that sustain power differences between men and women and between heterosexual and homosexual men (Kim et al., 2007). Although there are many cultural variations, gender-scripted rules are laid out, negotiated, and acted upon in bars and meeting places for singles and witnessed by TV viewers across the globe.

Gender roles are structured by one set of scripts designed for males and another designed for females. Although each script permits a range of behavior options, the typical result is that gender labels promote a pattern of between-sex competition, rejection, and emotional segregation. This pattern is reinforced when we routinely refer to those of the *other* sex (gender) as the *opposite* sex. Men and women label each other as opposite to who they are, then behave according to that label. The behavior serves to separate rather than connect the genders.

Doing Difference. Research on men and women in various social networks—formed at school, work, and in volunteer activities—further illustrates this process. From early childhood these groups are usually gender segregated. Gendered subcultures emerge that strengthen the perceptions of gender differences and

erode the common ground on which intimate, status-equal friendships between the genders are formed (Rouse, 2002). Differences rather than similarities are much more likely to be noticed, defined, and acted on. When cross-gender social interaction occurs, such as in the workplace, it is unlikely that men and women hold statuses with similar levels of power and prestige. Once the genders are socially constructed as different, it is easier for those with more power (men) to justify inequality toward those with less power (women). Social difference is constructed into social privilege (Fenstermaker and West, 2002).

Critique. Symbolic interaction's approach to understanding gender role behavior is criticized for its overall lack of attention to macrolevel processes that often limits choice of action and prompts people to engage in gendered behavior that counters what they would prefer to do. Cultural norms may be in flux at the microlevel of social interaction, but they remain a significant structural force on behavior. In some cultures, for example, women and men are dictated by both law and custom to engage in certain occupations, enter into marriages with people they would not choose on their own, and be restricted from attending school. Larger social structures also operate at the family level to explain family dynamics. Men and women interact not only as individual family members but also according to other roles they play in society and the prestige associated with those roles. For example, a wealthy white man who holds a powerful position in a corporation does not dissolve those roles when he walks into his home. They shape his life at home, in the workplace, and in the other social institutions in which he takes part. Race, class, and gender offer a range of privileges bestowed by the broader society that also create a power base in his home. Power and privilege can result in a patriarchal family regardless of the couple's desire for a more egalitarian arrangement.

Others argue that symbolic interaction's emphasis on doing gender undermines its fluidity to recast gender norms in ways that benefit both men and women. Divorce allows for the "redoing" of gender—housework, parenting, and breadwinning roles are repudiated (Walzer, 2008). Traditional gender accountability may no longer apply in the post-divorce lives of former spouses and children.

Research on social dancing and its highly sexualized "grinding" form demonstrates the ways females challenge scripts and may be redoing gender on the dance floor. In hip-hop clubs, young women of color set the dance stage for negotiating sexual and emotional encounters (Munoz-Laboy et al., 2007). These women challenge "hypermasculine" privilege by determining the form of dance, by taking the lead, by dancing with women, and by rejecting (or accepting) sexual groping by male partners. Other data suggest that young women of all races use social dance as escapism, fantasy, and compensatory sexuality, especially when dancing with acquaintances rather than friends (Hutt, 2008).

Taking a step further, some argue that symbolic interaction's doing gender approach needs to be abandoned. If gender accountability assumes that inequality is inevitable, research on ways of "undoing gender" should be the focus of sociological analysis. (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009:81). Are the young women on the dance floor "redoing" or "undoing gender"? Gendered scripts invade their dance space even as they transgress its boundaries.

> You buy into this scenario that. . . . we're all willing to pretend in this one place . . . that we're allowed to do things with each other that maybe you would think about doing off of first glance anyway. . . . it's kind of like a. . . . simulated closeness with people. (Hutt, 2008:12)

Sociological analysis of sexuality is beginning to explore the body not merely as a passive surface to be acted upon, but in its relationship to human agency (Bryant, 2007). More research is needed to determine if in the micro-worlds of post-divorce homes or in dance clubs traditional scripts can be modified enough to say that gender is "undone."

Feminist Sociological Theory

By calling attention to the powerful impact of gender in the social ordering of our relationships (microlevel analysis) and our institutions (macrolevel analysis), the feminist theoretical perspective in sociology emerged as a major model that has significantly reshaped the discipline. By the research it spawned, feminist sociological theory is not only bridging the micro–macro gap, it has also illuminated the androcentric bias in sociology and in broader society. Disagreement remains on all elements that need to be included in feminist theory, but at a minimum, the consensus is that a theory is feminist if it can be used to challenge a status quo that is disadvantageous to women (Chafetz, 1988; Smith, 2003).

The feminist perspective provides productive avenues of collaboration with sociologists who adopt other theoretical views, especially conflict theory and symbolic interaction. The feminist perspective is compatible with conflict theory in its assertions that structured social inequality is maintained by ideologies that are frequently accepted by both the privileged and the oppressed. These ideologies are challenged only when oppressed groups gain the resources necessary to do so. Unlike conflict theory's focus on social class and the economic elements necessary to challenge the prevailing system, feminists focus on women and their ability to amass resources from a variety of sources—in their individual lives (microlevel) and through social and political means (macrolevel). Feminists work through a number of avenues to increase women's **empowerment**—the ability for women to exert control over their own destinies.

Symbolic interaction and feminist theory come together in research focusing on the unequal power relations between men and women from the point of view (definition of the situation) of women who are "ruled" by men in many settings. For example, corporate women who want to be promoted need to practice impression management based on acceptable gender role behavior of their corporate setting, but at the same time they need to maintain a sense of personal integrity. The feminist perspective accounts for ways to empower these corporate women by clarifying the relationship between the label of "feminine" (symbolic interaction) and how these women are judged by peers and by themselves.

Linking Gender, Race, and Class. One of the most important contributions of the feminist perspective to sociology is its attention to the multiple oppressions faced by people whose status sets are disadvantaged due to distinctive combinations based on their gender, race, and social class. The gender–race–class linkage in analyzing social behavior originated with African American feminists in the 1960s, who recognized that an understanding of the link between these multiple oppressions is necessary to determine how women are alike and how they are different. For example, when the issue of poverty becomes "feminized," the issue is defined primarily by gender—women are at a higher risk of being poor than men. A focus on the feminization of poverty ignores the link among race, social class, and marital status that puts certain categories of women—such as single parents,

women of color, and elderly women living alone—at higher risk than others. To explain poverty, racial and class oppression must be considered along with gender. When white, middle-class feminists focus on oppression of women, they may not recognize the privileges that come with their own race and class.

The attention to sociocultural diversity that originated with the gender–race–class link has reverberated throughout sociology and other disciplines, generating a great deal of interdisciplinary research. It has opened new academic programs in Women's Studies, Men's Studies, and Gender Studies and has increased dialogue between men and women. Feminist scholarship provides opportunities for men to view themselves as gendered beings and to make visible their concerns (Brod, 2003; Kimmel, 2008). With the gender–race–class link as a foundation, feminist researchers are identifying other sites of oppression that put people at risk both inside and outside their families, such as religion, sexual orientation, age, or disability.

Feminist Perspectives on the Family. Feminist scholars in the 1960s and 1970s viewed the traditional patriarchal family as a major site for the oppression of women. They asserted that when the patriarchal family is regarded as beneficial to social stability, it hampers the movement into egalitarian roles desired by both men and women. Feminist sociologists recognize that gendered family relations do not occur in a vacuum and that lives are helped or hurt by the resources outside the family that shape what is happening inside the family. In addition to gender, for example, single-parent African-American, Latino, and Native American women are disadvantaged by race when they seek employment necessary to support their families. Lesbians must deal with a system that represses same-sex relationships when they fight for custody of their children. The growing consensus of feminists in all disciplines is that women may be doubly or triply disadvantaged by their race, class, or sexuality, but they are not helpless victims. To some degree they possess **agency**—the power to adapt and sometimes to thrive in difficult situations.

Critique. With a view of gender, marriage, and the family focusing on oppression of women, the feminist perspective tends to minimize the practical benefits of marriages. This contention is that a marriage may be patriarchal, but it also includes important economic resources and social support that women in these marriages may view as more important in their daily lives than their feelings about subordination. Feminist scholars also find it difficult to reconcile research suggesting that women in traditional marriages are as satisfied with their choices as women in egalitarian marriages. Finally, emphasis on human agency may minimize situations in which women's victimization is condoned by custom and ignored by law (Chapters 6, 8, 9, and 14).

A key strength of the feminist perspective is its ability to provide bridges between sociological theories and account for social diversity in all its forms. With its challenge to the patriarchal status quo and the androcentric bias inherent in much sociological research and theory, it has created dissent that may limit its acceptance by some sociologists. On the other hand, the feminist perspective may plant the seeds for building a truly integrative theory to draw together "conceptual pieces into a web of ideas that transcend patriarchal theory building" (Ollenburger and Moore, 1992:36). Feminist theory offers a powerful new perspective in sociology. Sociology will benefit from the intellectual ferment it has already created.

FEMINISM AND ITS BRANCHES

Feminist theory and its attention to diversity offer a sound framework for organizations working to change women's inferior social position and the social, political, and economic discrimination that perpetuates it. Many of these organizations come together in networks under the umbrella of **feminism**, an inclusive worldwide movement to end sexism and sexist oppression by empowering women. Thirty years ago the women's movement faltered because it did not realistically account for how intersecting categories of oppression can divide women (Breines, 2006). Through efforts of feminist networks across the globe and under the leadership of the United Nations and the women's conferences they organized, many of these divides have been bridged (Chapter 6).

Global social change presents new and ongoing challenges for women, so a feminist agenda addressing the needs of all women is never in a finalized form. Feminists accept the goal of ending sexism by empowering women, but there is a great deal of disagreement about how that goal is to be accomplished. Because the feminist movement is inclusive, it is unlikely there will ever be full agreement on identifying problems and determining strategies to address the problems. The very inclusiveness and diversity of the movement makes unity on some issues virtually impossible. Indeed, absence of complete unity is appropriate because it fuels those worldwide debates that often result in the most creative, realistic, and innovative strategies for women's empowerment. Reflecting the difficulty of adopting one agenda, the movement has tended to partition itself into several different branches according to general philosophical differences. Women and men identify with organizations and principles that may fall under more than one branch. In addition, the branches are fluid; they continue to recreate themselves as different waves of feminism flow through society (Chapter 5). Feminist branches, therefore, are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. Feminists as individuals or in the formal groups to which they belong, however, generally subscribe to the principles of one or another of the following branches.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism, also called "egalitarian or mainstream feminism," is considered the most moderate branch. It is based on the simple proposition that all people are created equal and should not be denied equality of opportunity because of gender. Because both genders benefit by the elimination of sexism, men are integrated into its ranks. Liberal feminism is based on Enlightenment beliefs of rationality, education, and the natural rights that extend to all men and women. This is articulated in John Stuart Mill's (1869/2002) *The Subjection of Women*, with his statement that "what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced oppression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others." Women can work together within a pluralistic system and mobilize their constituents to effect positive and productive social change. Demands will be met if mobilization is effective and pressure is efficiently wielded (Deckard, 1983:463).

Liberal feminists believe society does not have to be completely restructured to achieve empowerment for women and to incorporate women into meaningful and equitable roles. This view tends to be adopted by professional, middle-class women who place a high value on education and achievement. These women are likely to have the economic resources to better compete with men for desirable

social positions and employment opportunities. Liberal feminism thus appeals to "mainstream" women who have no disagreement with the overall structure of the present social system, only that it should be nonsexist. The National Organization for Women is the formal group representing this branch, with a statement of purpose calling for an end to restrictive gender roles that serve to diminish opportunities for both women and men (Chapter 14).

Cultural Feminism. Liberal feminists may also embrace "cultural feminism" with its focus on empowering women by emphasizing the positive qualities that are associated with women's roles such as nurturing, caring, cooperation, and connectedness to others (Worell, 1996:360). The issue of how much women are alike and how much they are different is highlighted in this emphasis. Although it does not constitute a separate branch of feminism per se, the debate around the "degree of gender difference or similarity" has allowed cultural feminism to become incorporated in all the feminist branches at some level. Liberal feminists, however, are more likely to subscribe to these principles than women in other branches.

Socialist Feminism

Also referred to as "Marxist feminism," socialist feminism generally adopts the Marx–Engels model described earlier that links the inferior position of women to class-based capitalism and its alignment with the patriarchal family in capitalistic societies. Socialist feminism argues that sexism and capitalism are mutually supportive. The unpaid labor of women in the home and their paid labor in a reserve labor force simultaneously serve patriarchy capitalism. Many socialist feminists—both men and women—also believe that economic and emotional dependence go hand in hand. Fearful of the loss of economic security, a husband's power over his wife is absolute. Capitalism needs to be eliminated and socialist principles adopted to both home and workplace. Sexism and economic oppression are mutually reinforcing, so a socialist revolutionary agenda is needed to change both.

Socialist feminism appeals to working-class women and those who feel disenfranchised from the presumed economic opportunities in capitalism. It has made a great deal of headway in Latin America and has served as a powerful rallying point for women in other developing nations. It is ironic that its most vivid expression occurred in the former Soviet Union, where women continued to carry the heavy burden of unpaid household labor while also functioning in the paid labor force.

Although socialist feminism is explicitly tied to Marxist theory, there are key differences between the two. Whereas Marxist theory focuses on property and economic conditions to build an ideology, socialist feminism focuses on sexuality and gender. Men and women retain interest in their own gender group, so it is unclear if the socialism being struggled for is the same for both men and women (Hartmann, 1993). A humane socialist approach to feminism requires consensus on what the new society should be and would require men to renounce their privileges as men.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is said to have emerged when women who were working with men in the civil rights and anti–Vietnam War movements were not allowed to present their positions on the causes they were engaged in. These women became aware of their own oppression by the treatment they received from their male cohorts, who insulted and ridiculed them for their views. The *second wave* of

feminism leading to the rebirth of the women's movement in the United States in the twentieth century may be traced to the women who found themselves derided and ignored by the people they believed to be their allies. History repeated itself. The roots of American feminism in the nineteenth century are traced to the women who were denied expression of their views by the men they worked with in the antislavery movement. The patronizing attitudes of the men of that era provided the catalyst for women to recognize gender-based oppression and then organize to challenge it (Chapter 5). A century later it happened again.

Contemporary radical feminists believe that sexism is at the core of patriarchal society and that all social institutions reflect that sexism. Whereas liberal feminists focus on the workplace and legal changes, radical feminists focus on the patriarchal family as the key site of domination and oppression (Shelton and Agger, 1993). They believe that because all social institutions are so intertwined, it is virtually impossible to attack sexism in any meaningful way. Women's oppression stems from male domination, so if men are the problem, neither capitalism, nor socialism, nor any other male-dominated system will solve the problem. Therefore, women must create separate institutions that are women centered—those that rely on women rather than men. Radical feminists would agree with cultural feminism in that the alternative path for women is to be different than men. A society will emerge where the female virtues of nurturance, sharing, and intuition will dominate in a woman-identified world.

Acknowledging the impossibility of removing sexism from all institutions, radical feminists work at local levels and in their neighborhoods to develop profit and not-for-profit institutions that are operated solely by women to serve other women, such as small businesses, day care facilities, counseling centers, and safe houses for women escaping domestic violence.

Reflecting more overall diversity than any of the other branches in its ranks, especially related to race and sexual orientation, these institutions vary considerably in structure, philosophy, and strategies to attain their goals. The blueprint for the women-identified society they envision is stamped on their activities that are much more individualized in other feminist branches. The conviction that male supremacy and oppression of women is the defining characteristic of a society is what unifies the disparate elements of radical feminism.

Multicultural and Global Feminism

The attention to diversity issues at the macrolevel is evident among feminists who organize around multicultural and global issues. This feminist branch focuses on the intersection of gender with race, class, and issues related to the colonization and exploitation of women in the developing world. Global feminism is a movement of people working for change across national boundaries. The world is interdependent and becoming more so. Global feminism contends that no woman is free until the conditions that oppress women worldwide are eliminated (Bunch, 1993:249). Multicultural feminism focuses on the specific cultural elements and historical conditions that serve to maintain women's oppression. In Latin America, for instance, military regimes have devised specific patterns of punishment and sexual enslavement for women who oppose their regimes (Bunster-Bunalto, 1993). Global feminism works to empower South Asian and Middle Eastern women who are restricted from schooling, health care, and paid employment simply because they are women.

In efforts to empower women, they do not support the idea of cultural relativism when it violates a woman's human rights, such as restricting a girl's access to education on religious grounds (Chapter 6). The women who came together for the United Nations Conferences on Women are representative of this view.

Ecofeminism

Some women are drawn into feminism by environmental activism. These women are the catalysts of ecofeminism, a newer branch of feminism. Ecofeminism connects the degradation and oppression of women with the degradation of the ecosystem. Drawing on earth-based spiritual imagery, ecofeminism suggests that the world's religions have an ethical responsilbilty to challenge a patriarchal system of corporate globalization that is deepening the impoverishment of the earth and its people (Low and Tremayne, 2001; Ruether, 2005). The planet can be healed and ecological harmony restored through political action emphasizing the principle of equality of all species (Bowerbank, 2001). With its holistic viewpoint and emphasis on interdependence in all its forms, ecofeminism is particularly compatible with global feminism.

All branches of feminism deal with the linkages of gender with other relevant social categories. Members of each branch and the groups they work with negotiate how gender is constructed according to their own needs and priorities. Different feminisms result from these constructions.

FEMINISM AND THE MEDIA

Why is feminism is considered the "f-word." Feminism is a movement to end the oppression of women. It uses women's perceptions and experiences to devise strategies for overcoming oppression. It embraces political goals that offer gender equality. We will see throughout this text that public support for feminist goals and women's empowerment is widespread. A large majority of American women agree that feminism has altered their lives for the better. Many women, however, refuse to identify themselves as feminists.

Through empowerment passivity has been replaced by open and critical debate between feminists and between those who agree or disagree with feminism. This debate is stimulating, is necessary, and fuels further empowerment. As noted earlier, inclusiveness feeds disagreement. Like the branches of feminism, feminists have different priorities and goals and they can agree to disagree. There are many feminisms and many themes of feminist thought. Feminists understand and accept the distinctions but they are presented to the public in highly distorted ways.

Portrayals of Feminsim

Media have a formidable influence in reinforcing gender role stereotypes, and the feminist stereotype is no exception. Both feminist agreement and the feminist value of disagreement are ignored or ridiculed not only in conservative media, but also throughout mainstream, cable news, and entertainment media. These portrayals also illustrate key features of **misogyny**, the contempt and disdain of women that propels their oppression. Media messages implicitly supporting misogyny propel stereotypes about feminism.

Media latch onto disagreements among feminists and present sound bytes giving the impressions that feminism has split into irreconcilable warring factions.

This negative media attention is reinforced with news format entertainment shows suggesting that women have already achieved political parity and legal parity with men, and because feminists have nothing else to fight for, they fight among themselves. Young women appear to be receptive to these messages because self-identification for feminism decreases significantly with age (Schnittker et al., 2002; Hogeland, 2007).

In addition to highlighting disagreement among feminists, media depict feminists as puritanical, man-hating, lesbain or butch, taking unfair advantage of men in the workplace, and controlling men in their homes. College students who identify themselves as "nonfeminists" believe many of these sterotypes (Blackwell et al., 2003; Houvouras and Scott, 2008). The credibility of a respected veteran female reporter was called into question by characterizing her as a "man-hating feminist" for daring to expose drug cheating in professional baseball (Burwell, 2009:B1). Prime time television series portray feminists in negative and highly stereotyped ways. Jokes deriding feminists about their appearance, sexuality and love life, and how they control their children and husbands are common. Boys who support assertive girls fear homophobic labels casting doubts about their masculinty (Chapter 9). Assertive girls are silenced when they are "accused" of being feminists. Young women and teens are often the targets of sexist jokes. Sexism is reinforced by the contemptuous statements about feminists routinely made by the popular and attractive characters in the shows (Chapter 13). Given the power of the media to construct gender roles, it is difficult for young women and men who may identify with feminism in principle to do so in public.

Racist comments are unacceptable in entertainment and news media. Sexist comments are acceptable. Consider the infamous response by John McCain to a female supporter (referring to Hillary Clinton) when he was asked "how do we beat the bitch?" Although momentarily taken aback by her comment, amid the laughter, he smiled and responded: "but that's an excellent question" (Kantor, 2008). Consider his probable response if his supporter had used a racist slur rather than a sexist one? The Obama campaign remained silent about sexist commentary or intrusion into the personal lives of opposing candidates until after the primary election.

Feminism and Election 2008

As if waiting in the wings to be re-ignited, feminist bashing made a "gut-wrenching" comeback during the 2008 election (Merkin, 2008). For the first time in U.S. history, women were very viable contenders for the highest offices: New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton as potential Democrat nominee for President and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin as Republican nominee for Vice President. With feminism taking center stage, a storm of gender-based commentary was unleashed during the run-up to the election. Public perception of these (and other) candidates was skewed via media rendering of gender and of feminism (Mandziuk, 2008; Sotirovic, 2008). Both Clinton and Palin self-identified as feminists. However, they were portrayed as very different feminists according to the media.

Hillary Rodham Clinton. Hillary Clinton's feminist label was intermittently applauded in a few news media, suspiciously viewed throughout mainstream media, and scorned and ridiculed in right-wing media. Although Clinton ran a campaign that included, but did not focus on, women's issues, her feminism and—by extension—her personality were associated with divisiveness, "unlikability," and media-constructed views of radicalism. Feminism was further diminished when

Clinton was couched as an opportunist interested in personal ambition rather than public service and unsure of her beliefs about how far she was willing to go in support of women (Reimer, 2008; Stansell, 2008). Virtually no mainstream media source countered these stereotyped, inaccurate images of feminism associated with Clinton's campaign. Media instead spotlighted women, feminist or not, who endorsed Barack Obama's candidacy. The public heard messages that women are their own enemies, that feminism is unraveling, and that the sisterhood is split (Wiener, 2007; Valenti, 2008). Feminists who agree to disagree or those engaged in critical debate with one another were absent in media discourse. Feminism as applied to Clinton in the media represented a threat to politics as usual.

Sarah Palin. Although Sarah Palin and the social conservatives who supported her would largely disagree with a feminist political agenda (Chapter 14), she did identify herself as a feminist in the now famous interview when Katie Couric asked if Palin considered herself a feminist. Palin's response: "I do. A feminist who believes in equal rights, and I believe that women certainly today have every opportunity that a man has to succeed, and to try to do it all, anyway" (Couric, 2008). Sarah Palin's feminist label was generally applauded, regardless of the political persuasion of the media source. The McCain–Palin ticket ran a campaign that put Palin in charge of policy statements reinforcing traditional views of women that resonated with social conservatives. As applied to Palin, feminism was benignly to positively portrayed by her status as an elected official, as a mother with small children, and with a supportive husband in a marriage that did not demean his role. Feminists largely disagreed with the policy agenda (or lack of one) to meaningfully bolster women in such roles. However, they supported Palin's quest for public office, especially in her role model status for young women and for working mothers (Baird et al., 2008; Montagne, 2008). In utterly false and astonishing media messages, however, feminists were cast as *detractors* of women's "right" to have a career and a family (Young, 2008). Regardless of the feminist label, the McCain–Palin ticket embraced an antifeminist agenda. Feminism, as applied to Palin, did not represent a threat to politics as usual.

Critique. Feminism is light years advanced with two centuries of messages supporting employed mothers, equal opportunity for men and women, and equal pay for equal work. The majority of the American public accepts and approves of these feminist messages. Even while clinging to traditional views about gender roles, evangelical women now generally agree that women may have careers; some of these women may also be mothers (Riley, 2008). Are these and other socially conservative women, therefore, feminists? Symbolic interactionists argue that the authenticity of any label is only determined by self-definition and the ability of the actor to convince others to accept this definition. First Lady Michelle Obama's popularity is linked to ensuring that her children ride the wave of their White House residency as smoothly as possible. She is judged by her ability to maintain family normalcy amid the ever-present spotlight on her children, especially by conservative media (Harris-Lacewell, 2009). As she is a strong supporter of feminist goals, media attention to her "warmer side" buffers stereotypes about feminists being too strident (Stanley, 2008). Contrary to media assertions, her support by feminists will likely remain strong regardless of her willingness to engage in a pro-woman agenda outside her family roles; whereas her support by social conservatives for this type of engagement would likely erode. To maintain a broad base of support from all ranks of women she walks a narrow and difficult line.

Portrayals of Clinton and Palin for their feminist views cannot be separated from the sexism that mired both their candidacies, particularly related to their

appearance and demeanor: Clinton, because she was too masculine; Palin, because she was too feminine. Journalists were suspicious of Clinton's feminist image, but she was taken seriously as a viable candidate. For Palin, media sexism was evident for failure to seriously engage her on the difficult issues related to the economic and international challenges facing the United States. Regardless of her feminist assertion, media focus on personal matters rather than on political matters served to undermine Palin's credibility as a serious candidate (Gibbons, 2008). However, the McCain–Palin ticket in turn lost credibility by claiming that the media was sexist when asking the vice presidential nominee unfair questions about her experience, and by pressing John McCain on his abysmal record of advocacy for women. The public agreed that the media focus on Palin's family life was sexist; they also believed that claims of sexism when media questioned candidates on their policies about women were hypocrisy (Quindlen, 2008).

Challenging the Backlash to Feminism

How can feminist strength and productive messages to women be projected positively when feminists dare to disagree with one another in public? Several reasons support the contention that feminism may be reframed in a more favorable light by the media. First, young women lulled into believing that sexism was in its death throes were jolted into an awareness during the campaign that feminist goals continue to be illusive. Sexism in the election served a latent function by raising consciousness that obstacles remain for women seeking success, whether in the media or in the political and business worlds (Fuller, 2008:4). Second, Hillary Clinton's vocal support for feminist goals and Sarah Palin's admission that she, too, is a feminist will be difficult to dislodge from the vernacular of media. Conservative female candidates may have difficulty recanting feminism after Palin's admission. Third, the public sees a variety of feminisms at work; at a basic level at least, feminist goals are being embraced. Antifeminist and racist attacks were unleashed in fury by right-wing extremists when Judge Sonia Sotomayor, a Latina and a Catholic, was nominated to the Supreme Court (Baker and Zeleny, 2009; Media Matters, 2009). Hillary Clinton lost her presidential bid, but she is now the third female Secretary of State. The severe backlash against feminism, ironically, is a sign that barriers may be eroding.

The theories and concepts presented in this chapter and the visions of society that they suggest are offered as tools to be used in approaching the following chapters and the array of issues related to gender roles you will be confronting. Each theoretical perspective has its own insight and explanation for any given issue. Issues are further refined when theories are used in combination with one another. As these issues are addressed, consider which perspective you believe to be the most appropriate and realistic. It is hoped that at the conclusion of this book you will have developed a perspective on gender roles that is most meaningful to you.

Summary

1. As one of the most important trends in sociology in the twentieth century, the study of gender has led to a new feminist paradigm and opened up new topics for research, especially the connection between gender, race, and social class.
2. All social interaction is gendered. Gendered social interaction is guided by status, positions people occupy, and roles, the behavior associated with a status. Sexism and discrimination result when the status and role of female and male become stereotyped.

3. *Sex* is the biological component of male and female, *gender* is the social and psychological component, and *sexual orientation* is the way people experience sexual pleasure. These terms are often confused.
4. Sociological explanations for gender roles are guided by four theoretical perspectives: functionalism focuses on how gender role contributes to social order or equilibrium; conflict theory focuses on the level of power associated with gender; symbolic interaction focuses on gender as socially constructed and how people "do" gender in everyday life; and the feminist perspective focuses on women's empowerment and draws attention to multiple oppressions due to race, class, and gender.
5. Feminism is a worldwide movement to end sexism by empowering women. Branches of feminism include liberal feminism, its most mainstream and inclusive branch focusing on working within the system to end sexism; cultural feminism, focusing on positive qualities of women's roles; socialist feminism, focusing on ending sexism by eliminating capitalism and adopting socialist principles; radical feminism, calling for women to create separate, women-centered social institutions; multicultural or global feminism, working for change across national boundaries; and ecofeminism, focusing on environmental action.
6. A severe backlash to feminism and media reinforcement of gender and feminist sterotypes occurred during the 2008 election and influenced perception of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin as viable candidates. Feminism can be recast in the media, so positive feminist messages are heard.

Key Terms

androcentrism 3
agency 13
doing gender 10
dramaturgy 10
empowerment 12
end point fallacy 9
expressive role 6
feminism 14
gender 4
gender roles 4
instrumental role 6
misogyny 17
norms 2
patriarchy 3
role 2
sex 4
sexism 3
sexual orientation 4
social construction of reality 10
social stratification 2
status 2
status set 2
stereotypes 3
theory 4

Critical Thinking Questions

1. How would a functionalist, conflict theorist, symbolic interactionist, and feminist answer the following question: Why do men hold the most powerful economic and political positions across the globe? What social policies would theorists from each of these groups offer as mechanisms to make this situation more gender equitable?
2. Considering the intersection of gender, race, and class and the distinctions between the various branches of feminism, provide realistic alternatives for ways women can "celebrate" both their diversity and their unity at the same time.
3. The backlash to feminism (the "f-word") is often media based. Which sociological theory do you think best explains this backlash? Suggest strategies consistent with the theory you select to alter this perception.