Gender and Age

In Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, *on Africa's northern coast, I met some U.S. college students and spent a couple of days with them. They wanted to see the city's red light district, but I wondered whether it would be worth the trip. I already had seen other red light districts, including the unusual one in Amsterdam where a bronze statue of a female prostitute lets you know you've entered the area; the state licenses the women and men, requiring that they have medical checkups (certificates must be posted); and the prostitutes add sales tax to the receipts they give customers. The prostitutes sit behind lighted picture windows while customers stroll along the narrow canal-side streets and "window shop" from the outside. Tucked among the brothels are day care centers, bakeries, and clothing stores. Amsterdam itself is an unusual place—in cafes, you can smoke marijuana but not tobacco.*

The prostitutes sit behind lighted picture windows while customers stroll along the narrow canal-side streets and "window shop" from the outside.

I decided to go with them. We ended up on a wharf that extended into the Mediterranean. Each side was lined with a row of one-room wooden shacks, crowded one against the next. In front of each open door stood a young woman. Peering from outside into the dark interiors, I could see that each door led to a tiny room with an old, well-worn bed.

The wharf was crowded with men who were eyeing the women and negotiating prices. Many of the men wore sailor uniforms from countries that I couldn't identify.

As I looked more closely, I could see that some of the women had running sores on their legs. Incredibly, with such visible evidence of their disease, men still sought them out.

With a sick feeling in my stomach and the desire to vomit, I kept a good distance between the beckoning women and myself. One tour of the two-block area was more than sufficient.

Somewhere nearby, out of sight, I knew that there were men whose wealth derived from exploiting these women who were condemned to short lives punctuated by fear and misery.

In the previous chapter, we considered how race–ethnicity affects people's well-being and their position in society. In this chapter, we examine **gender stratification**—males' and females' unequal access to property, power, and prestige. We also explore the prejudice and discrimination directed to people because of their age.

Gender and age are especially significant because, like race–ethnicity, they are *master statuses;* that is, they cut across *all* aspects of social life. We all are labeled male or female and are assigned an age category. These labels are powerful. Not only do, they convey images and expectations about how we should act, but they also serve as a basis of power and privilege.

Inequalities of Gender

Let's begin by considering the distinctions between sex and gender.

Issues of Sex and Gender

When we consider how females and males differ, the first thing that usually comes to mind is **sex**, the *biological characteristics* that distinguish males and females. *Primary sex characteristics* consist of a vagina or a penis and other organs related to reproduction. *Secondary sex characteristics* are the physical distinctions between males and females that

Differences in how we display gender often lie below our awareness. How males and females use social space is an example. In this unposed photo from Grand Central Station in New York City, you can see how males tend to sprawl out, females to enclose themselves. Why do you think this difference exists? Biology? Socialization? Both?

10.1 Distinguish between sex and gender; use research on Vietnam veterans and testosterone to explain why the door to biology is opening in sociology.

gender stratification males' and females' unequal access to property, power, and prestige

sex biological characteristics that distinguish females and males, consisting of primary and secondary sex characteristics

gender the behaviors and attitudes that a society considers proper for its males and females; masculinity or femininity

are not directly connected with reproduction. These characteristics become clearly evident at puberty when males develop larger muscles, lower voices, more body hair, and greater height, while females develop breasts and form more fatty tissue and broader hips.

Gender, in contrast, is a *social*, not a biological characteristic. **Gender** consists of whatever behaviors and attitudes a group considers proper for its males and females. Sex refers to male or female, and *gender* refers to masculinity or femininity. In short, you inherit your sex, but you learn your gender as you learn the behaviors and attitudes your culture asserts are appropriate for your sex.

As the photo montage on the next page illustrates, the expectations associated with gender differ around the world. They vary so greatly that some sociologists replace the terms *masculinity* and *femininity* with *masculinities* and *femininities*.

The Sociological Significance of Gender. *The sociological significance of gender is that it is a device by which society controls its members.* Gender sorts us, on the basis of sex, into different life experiences. It opens and closes doors to property, power, and prestige. Like social class, gender is a structural feature of society.

Before examining inequalities of gender, let's consider why the behaviors of men and women differ.

Gender Differences in Behavior: Biology or Culture?

Why are most males more aggressive than most females? Why do women enter "nurturing" occupations, such as teaching young children and nursing, in far greater numbers than men? To answer such questions, many people respond with some variation of "They're born that way."

Is this the correct answer? Certainly biology plays a significant role in our lives. Each of us begins as a fertilized egg. The egg, or ovum, is contributed by our mother, the sperm that fertilizes the egg by our father. At the very instant the egg is fertilized, our sex is determined. Each of us receives twenty-three chromosomes from the ovum and twenty-three from the sperm. The egg has an X chromosome. If the sperm that fertilizes the egg also has an X chromosome, the result is a girl (XX). If the sperm has a Y chromosome, the result is a boy (XY).

The Dominant Position in Sociology. That's the biology. Now, the sociological question is, Does this biological difference control our behavior? Does it, for example, make females more nurturing and submissive and males more aggressive and domineering? Here is the quick sociological answer: The dominant sociological position is that *social* factors, not biology, are the reasons people do what they do.

Let's apply this position to gender. If biology were the principal factor in human behavior, all around the world we would find women behaving in one way and men in another. Men and women would be just like male spiders and female spiders, whose genes tell them what to do. In fact, however, ideas of gender vary greatly from one culture to another—and, as a result, so do male–female behaviors.

Despite this, to see why the door to biology is opening just slightly in sociology, let's consider a medical accident and a study of Vietnam veterans.

Opening the Door to Biology
A Medical Accident.

In 1963, 7-month-old identical twin boys were taken to a doctor for a routine circumcision. The physician, not the most capable person in the world, was using a heated needle. He turned the electric current too high and accidentally burned off the penis of one of the boys.

Standards of Gender

Each human group determines its ideas of "maleness" and "femaleness." As you can see from these photos of four women and four men, standards of gender are arbitrary and vary from one culture to another. Yet, in its ethnocentrism, each group thinks that its preferences reflect what gender "really" is. As indicated here, around the world men and women try to make themselves appealing by aspiring to their group's standards of gender.

Mexico

Jordan

Kenya

Ethiopia

Brazil

New Guinea

India

China

You can imagine the parents' disbelief—and then their horror—as the truth sank in. What could they do? After months of soul-searching and tearful consultations with experts, the parents decided that their son should have a sex-change operation (Money and Ehrhardt 1972). When he was 22 months old, surgeons castrated the boy, using the skin to construct a vagina. The parents then gave the child a new name, Brenda, dressed him in frilly clothing, let his hair grow long, and began to treat him as a girl. Later, physicians gave Brenda female steroids to promote female puberty (Colapinto 2001).

At first, the results were promising. When the twins were 4 years old, the mother said (remember that the children are biologically identical):

> *One thing that really amazes me is that she is so feminine. I've never seen a little girl so neat and tidy. . . . She likes for me to wipe her face. She doesn't like to be dirty, and yet my son is quite different. I can't wash his face for anything. . . . She is very proud of herself, when she puts on a new dress, or I set her hair. . . . She seems to be daintier. (Money and Ehrhardt 1972)*

If the matter were this clear-cut, we could use this case to conclude that gender is determined entirely by nurture. Seldom are things in life so simple, however, and a twist occurs in this story.

Despite this promising start and her parents' coaching, Brenda did not adapt well to femininity. She preferred to mimic her father shaving, rather than her mother putting on makeup. She rejected dolls, favoring guns and her brother's toys. She liked rough-and-tumble games and insisted on urinating standing up. Classmates teased her and called her a "cavewoman" because she walked like a boy. At age 14, she was expelled from school for beating up a girl who teased her. Despite estrogen treatment, she was not attracted to boys. At age 14, when despair over her inner turmoil brought her to the brink of suicide, her father, in tears, told Brenda about the accident and her sex change.

"All of a sudden everything clicked. For the first time, things made sense, and I understood who and what I was," the twin said of this revelation. David (his new name) was given testosterone shots and, later, had surgery to partially reconstruct a penis. At age 25, David married a woman and adopted her children (Diamond and Sigmundson 1997; Colapinto 2001). There is an unfortunate end to this story, however. In 2004, David committed suicide.

David Reimer, whose story is recounted here.
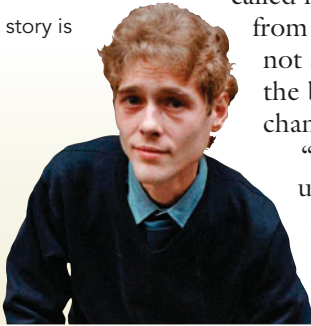
The Vietnam Veterans Study.   Time after time, researchers have found that boys and men who have higher levels of testosterone tend to be more aggressive (Eisenegger et al. 2011). In one study, researchers compared the testosterone levels of college men in a "rowdy" fraternity with those of men in a fraternity that had a reputation for academic achievement. Men in the "rowdy" fraternity had higher levels of testosterone (Dabbs et al. 1996). In another study, researchers found that prisoners who had committed sex crimes and other crimes of violence had higher levels of testosterone than those who had committed property crimes (Dabbs et al. 1995). The samples were small, however, leaving the nagging uncertainty that these findings might be due to chance.

Then in 1985, the U.S. government began a health study of Vietnam veterans. To be certain that the study was representative, the researchers chose a random sample of 4,462 men. Among the data they collected was a measurement of testosterone. This sample supported the earlier studies. When the veterans with higher testosterone levels were boys, they were more likely to get in trouble with parents and teachers and to become delinquents. As adults, they were more likely to use hard drugs, to get into fights, to end up in lower-status jobs, and to have more sexual partners. Those who married were more likely to have affairs, to hit their wives, and, it follows, to get divorced (Dabbs and Morris 1990; Booth and Dabbs 1993).

This makes it sound like biology is the basis for behavior. Fortunately for us sociologists, there is another side to this research, and here is where *social class*, the topic of Chapter 8, comes into play. The researchers compared high-testosterone men from

higher and lower social classes. The men from lower social classes were more likely to get in trouble with the law, do poorly in school, and mistreat their wives (Dabbs and Morris 1990). You can see, then, that *social* factors such as socialization, subcultures, life goals, and self-definitions were significant in these men's behavior.

More Research on Humans.   Research on the effects of testosterone in humans continues. The results are intriguing. Not only do higher levels of testosterone lead to higher dominance but the reverse is also true: Dominance behavior, such as winning a game, also produces higher levels of testos- terone. This has made it difficult to determine which causes which. Controlled studies in which cause can be determined help. When researchers administer single doses of testosterone, dominance behavior increases. This is true of *both* males and females. They seek higher status and show less concern for the feelings of others (Eisenegger et al. 2011). Researchers are investigating how the testosterone changes people's behaviors, which they think might be by trigger- ing other hormones.

In Sum: Sociologists acknowledge that biological factors are involved in some human behavior other than reproduction and childbearing (Udry 2000). Alice Rossi, a feminist sociologist and former president of the American Sociological Association, suggested that women are better prepared biologically for "mothering" than are men. Rossi (1977, 1984) said that women are more sensitive to the infant's soft skin and to their nonverbal communications.

Perhaps Rossi expressed it best when she said that the issue is not either biology or society. Instead, whatever biological predispositions nature provides are overlaid with culture. A task of sociologists is to discover how social factors modify biology, especially, as sociologist Janet Chafetz (1990:30) said, to determine how "different" becomes translated into "unequal."

The sociological perspective—that of social factors in human behavior—dominates this book, and in the Thinking Critically section that follows, we will explore how gen- der is changing.

Sociologists study the social factors that underlie human behavior, the experiences that mold us, funneling us into different directions in life. The research on Vietnam veterans indicates how the sociological door is opening slowly to also consider biological factors in human behavior. This February 14, 1966, photo shows soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division carrying a buddy who had just been shot.

THINKING CRITICALLY
Making the Social Explicit: Emerging Masculinities and Femininities

Muscles rippling, a large male athlete strode into a class of 400 wearing a dress. The class broke into cheers, applauding his daring to break gender rules. The next week, a slightly-built, effeminate male student came into the same class wearing a dress. The class treated him like an outcast. As students moved away from him, he was surrounded by empty chairs (Anderson 2009:43).

People who are highly successful in meeting cultural standards of gender are given more leeway to temporarily transgress gender boundaries. The two men wearing dresses illustrate this principle at work. The students knew that the hyper- masculine athlete was "just fooling around" or "making a point." But the effeminate man? No one was certain about him. His dress could have reflected a "real" violation of gender boundaries.

How do men who work in traditionally feminine nurturng jobs and women who work in jobs that give them authority over men reaffirm their gender at home?

"Doing Gender": The Traditional Model.   As you know, strength and dominance are central to the traditional model of masculinity in U.S. society. Expected of males are large muscles, endurance and stamina, victory in competitive events, and achievement despite obstacles. For men, life has been cast as a form of competition in which they are pitted against one another. They are expected to mask compassion and avoid the appearance of weakness, fear, and vulnerability.

On the feminine side, the dominant model allows women to show—and probably to feel—more emotions than men. They can express greater compassion and feel and show fears and weaknesses. This feminine model also dictates that women meet the flip side of masculine dominance—making the real woman submissive to the strong man.

A good part of "doing gender" is to show that we are *not* one of *them*. Most men try to avoid things that might be considered feminine or girlish. Most women try to do things defined as feminine, which they often manage by their clothing, makeup, speech, and gestures. Although this cultural boundary is often more difficult to locate than it was in previous generations, women manage it.

Reclaiming Gender.   With doing gender so essential to our identities, what happens when women take jobs that give them authority at work, such as being supervisors, traditionally defined as masculine? Or to men who take nurturing jobs, such as nursing, traditionally defined as feminine? To find out, sociologist Daniel Schneider (2012) compared these women and men with people who work at jobs that match traditional ideas of gender. Compared with women who work at nurturing jobs, the women who exercise authority at work spend more time at home doing "feminine" activities, such as cleaning, cooking, and washing the dishes. And compared with men whose work gives them authority over others, the men who work at nurturing jobs spend more time at home doing "masculine" activities, such as making repairs and pruning the shrubbery. Gender is so locked into them that—beyond their awareness—they are reclaiming their gender, affirming that they are not one of "them."

New Models of Gender.   Ideas of gender are changing, and new models are taking their place alongside the traditional ones. In the new models of softer masculinity, men can be masculine *and* still show tenderness, ask for help, diaper babies, form emotional bonds with others, and even tenderly touch both women and men. The emerging models of femininity encourage women to be more dominant. Women gain cultural approval for competing in business and the professions—and *winning* in what had been a men's arena. From action movies, you can even see the "tough femininity" that is emerging, one that incorporates masculine violence. This new femininity also shows up among female juvenile delinquents, with girls winning approval for attacking others, even men (Rios 2011).

As the new masculinities incorporate behaviors previously considered off limits or taboo, we can also expect a decrease of homophobia (dislike and fear of homosexuals). Homophobia seems to be based on a need to maintain gender boundaries, a need to mark a sharp distance from anyone who threatens the dominant model of masculinity or femininity. As cultural attitudes shift, no longer will there be this urgent need to show that "I'm not gay." As this model softens, then, so will attitudes toward homosexuals.

For Your Consideration

➤ Do you agree that the dominant form of masculinity and femininity is changing, that we are developing femininities and masculinities? What have you experienced to indicate that this is a correct or incorrect observation? How about the author's statement that homophobia will decrease?

Gender Inequality in Global Perspective

Around the world, gender is *the* primary division between people. To catch a glimpse of how remarkably gender expectations differ with culture, look at the photo essay on the next two pages. Every society sorts men and women into separate groups and gives them different access to property, power, and prestige. These divisions *always* favor men-as-a-group. After reviewing the historical record, historian and feminist Gerda Lerner (1986) concluded that "there is not a single society known where women-as-a-group have decision-making power over men (as a group)." Consequently, sociologists classify females as a *minority group*. Because females outnumber males, you may find this strange. This term applies, however, because *minority group* refers to people who are discriminated against on the basis of physical or cultural characteristics, regardless of their numbers (Hacker 1951).

patriarchy men-as-a-group dominating women-as-a-group; authority is vested in males

How Did Females Become a Minority Group?

Have females always been a minority group? Some analysts speculate that in hunting and gathering societies, women and men were social equals (Leacock 1981; Hendrix 1994) and that horticultural societies also had less gender discrimination than is common today (Collins et al. 1993). In these societies, women may have contributed about 60 percent of the group's total food. Yet, around the world, gender is the basis for discrimination.

Men's work? Women's work? Customs in other societies can blow away stereotypes. As is common throughout India, these women are working on road construction.

How, then, did it happen that women became a minority group? The main theory that has been proposed to explain the origin of **patriarchy**—men dominating society—centers on human reproduction (Lerner 1986; Friedl 1990). In early human history, life was short. Because people died young, if the group were to survive, women had to give birth to many children. This brought severe consequences for women. To survive, an infant needed a nursing mother. If there were no woman to nurse the child, it died. With a child at her breast or in her uterus, or one carried on her hip or on her back, women were not able to stay away from camp for as long as the men could. They also had to move slower. Around the world, then, women assumed the tasks that were associated with the home and child care, while men hunted the large animals and did other tasks that required both greater speed and longer absences from the base camp (Huber 1990).

Through the Author's Lens

Work and Gender: Women at Work in India

Traveling through India was both a pleasant and an eye-opening experience. The country is incredibly diverse, the people friendly, and the land culturally rich. For this photo essay, wherever I went—whether city, village, or countryside—I took photos of women at work.

From these photos, you can see that Indian women work in a wide variety of occupations. Some of their jobs match traditional Western expectations, and some diverge sharply from our gender stereotypes. Although women in India remain subservient to men—with the women's movement hardly able to break the cultural surface—women's occupations are hardly limited to the home. I was surprised at some of the hard, heavy labor that Indian women do.

The villages of India have no indoor plumbing. Instead, each village has a well with a hand pump, and it is the women's job to fetch the water. This is backbreaking work, for, after pumping the water, the women wrestle the heavy buckets onto their heads and carry them home. This was one of the few kinds of work I saw that was limited to women.

Indian women are highly visible in public places. A storekeeper is as likely to be a woman as a man. This woman is selling glasses of water at a beach on the Bay of Bengal. The structure on which her glasses rest is built of sand.

I visited quarries in different parts of India, where I found men, women, and children hard at work in the tropical sun. This woman works 8 ½ hours a day, six days a week. She earns 40 rupees a day (about ninety cents). Men make 60 rupees a day (about $1.35). Like many quarry workers, this woman is a bonded laborer. She must give half of her wages to her master.

Women also take care of livestock. It looks as though this woman dressed up and posed for her photo, but this is what she was wearing and doing when I saw her in the field and stopped to talk to her. While the sheep are feeding, her job is primarily to "be" there, to make certain the sheep don't wander off or that no one steals them.

© James M. Henslin, all photos

Sweeping the house is traditional work for Western women. So it is in India, but the sweeping has been extended to areas outside the home. These women are sweeping a major intersection in Chennai. When the traffic light changes here, the women will continue sweeping, with the drivers swerving around them. This was one of the few occupations that seems to be limited to women.

As in the West, food preparation in India is traditional women's work. Here, however, food preparation takes an unexpected twist. Having poured rice from the 60-pound sack onto the floor, these women in Chittoor search for pebbles or other foreign objects that might be in the rice.

INDIA

When I saw this unusual sight, I had to stop and talk to the workers. From historical pictures, I knew that belt-driven machines were common on U.S. farms 100 years ago. This one in Tamil Nadu processes sugar cane. The woman feeds sugar cane into the machine, which disgorges the stalks on one side and sugar cane juice on the other.

This woman belongs to the Dhobi subcaste, whose occupation is washing clothes. She stands waist deep at this same spot doing the same thing day after day. The banks of this canal in Hyderabad are lined with men and women of her caste, who are washing linens for hotels and clothing for more well-to-do families.

A common sight in India is women working on construction crews. As they work on buildings and on highways, they mix cement, unload trucks, carry rubble, and, following Indian culture, carry loads of bricks atop their heads. This photo was taken in Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

A theory of how *patriarchy* originated centers on childbirth. Because only women give birth, they assumed tasks associated with home and child care, while men hunted and performed other survival tasks that required greater strength, speed, and absence from home. This photo was taken in Bangladesh.

This led to men becoming dominant. When the men left the camp to hunt animals, they made contact with other tribes. They traded with them, gaining new possessions—and they also quarreled and waged war with them. It was also the men who made and controlled the instruments of power and death, the weapons that were used for hunting and warfare. The men heaped prestige upon themselves as they returned to the camp triumphantly, leading captured prisoners and displaying their new possessions or the large animals they had killed to feed themselves and the women and children.

Contrast this with the women's activities: routine, dull, and taken-for-granted. The women kept the fire going, took care of the children, and did the cooking. There was nothing triumphant about what they did—and they were not perceived as risking their lives for the group. The women were "simply there," awaiting the return of their men, ready to acclaim their accomplishments.

Men, then, took control of society. Their sources of power were their weapons, items of trade, and the knowledge they gained from their contact with other groups. Women did not have access to these sources of power, which the men enshrouded in secrecy. The women became second-class citizens, subject to whatever the men decided.

Global Violence against Women

A global human rights issue is violence against women. Historical examples include foot binding in China, witch burning in Europe, and, in India, *suttee*, burning the living widow with the body of her dead husband. Today, we have rape, wife beating, female infanticide, and the kidnapping of women to be brides. There is also forced prostitution, which was probably the case in our opening vignette. Another notorious example is female circumcision, the topic of the Cultural Diversity box on the next page.

"Honor killings" are another form of violence against women (Yardley 2010). In some societies, such as India, Jordan, Kurdistan, and Pakistan, a woman who is thought to have brought disgrace on her family is killed by a male relative—usually a brother or her husband, but sometimes her father or uncles. What threat to a family's honor can be so severe that a man would kill his own daughter, wife, or sister? The usual reason is sex outside of marriage. Virginity at marriage is so prized in these societies that even a woman who has been raped is in danger of becoming the victim of an honor killing (Zoepf 2007; Falkenberg 2008). Killing the girl or woman—even one's own sister or mother—removes the "stain" she has brought to the family and restores its honor in the community. Sharing this view, the police generally ignore honor killings, viewing them as private family matters.

Photo of Xiao Xiuxiang, taken in 2002. Tiny feet were a status symbol. Making it difficult for a woman to walk; small feet indicated that a woman's husband did not need his wife's labor. To make the feet even smaller, sometimes the baby's feet were broken and wrapped tightly. Some baby's toes were cut off. Footbinding was banned by the Chinese government in 1911, but continued to be practiced in some places for several decades.

In Sum: Gender inequality is not some accidental, hit-or-miss affair. Rather, each society's institutions work together to maintain the group's particular forms of inequality. Customs, often venerated throughout history, both justify and maintain these arrangements. In some cases, the prejudice and discrimination directed at females are so extreme that they lead to enslavement and death.

Cultural Diversity around the World

Female Circumcision

"Lie down there," the excisor suddenly said to me [when I was 12], pointing to a mat on the ground. No sooner had I laid down than I felt my frail, thin legs grasped by heavy hands and pulled wide apart. . . . Two women on each side of me pinned me to the ground . . . I underwent the ablation of the labia minor and then of the clitoris. The operation seemed to go on forever. I was in the throes of agony, torn apart both physically and psychologically. It was the rule that girls of my age did not weep in this situation. I broke the rule. I cried and screamed with pain . . . !

Afterwards they forced me, not only to walk back to join the other girls who had already been excised, but to dance with them. I was doing my best, but then I fainted. . . . It was a month before I was completely healed. When I was better, everyone mocked me, as I hadn't been brave, they said. (Walker and Parmar 1993:107–108)

Worldwide, about 140 million females have been circumcised, mostly in Muslim Africa and in some parts of Malaysia and Indonesia (Lazaro 2011). In Egypt and Indonesia, about 95 percent of the women have been circumcised (Slackman 2007; Leopold 2012). In most cultures, the surgery takes place between the ages of 4 and 8, but in some, it is not performed until the girls reach adolescence. Because the surgery is usually done without anesthesia, the pain is excruciating and adults hold the girls down. In urban areas, physicians sometimes perform the operation; in rural areas, a neighborhood woman usually does it, often with a razor blade.

In some cultures, only the girl's clitoris is cut off; in others, more is removed. In Sudan, the Nubians cut away most of the girl's genitalia, then sew together the outer edges. They bind the girl's legs from her ankles to her waist for several weeks while scar tissue closes up the vagina. They leave a small opening the diameter of a pencil for the passage of urine and menstrual fluids. When a woman marries, the opening is cut wider to permit sexual intercourse. Before she gives birth, the opening is enlarged further. After birth, the vagina is again sutured shut. This cycle of surgically closing and opening begins anew with each birth.

Why are girls circumcised? Some groups believe that it reduces sexual desire, making it more likely that a woman will be a virgin at marriage and, afterward, remain faithful to her husband. Others think that women can't bear children if they aren't circumcised.

Feminists have campaigned against female circumcision, calling it a form of ritual torture to control female sexuality.

An excisor (cutter) in Uganda holding the cutting blades she is about to use to circumcise teenage girls.

They point out that men dominate the societies that practice it.

Change is on the way. Responding to a social movement to ban female circumcision, the World Health Organization has declared that female circumcision is a human rights issue. Fifteen African countries have made the circumcision of females illegal. Without sanctions, though, these laws accomplish little. Egypt prohibited female circumcision in 1996, but almost all girls continue to be circumcised (Leopold 2012).

Some mothers and grandmothers even insist that this custom continue. Their concern is that their daughters marry well, and in some of these societies, uncircumcised women are considered impure and are not allowed to marry.

Health workers have hit upon a strategy that is meeting with some success. To overcome resistance to change, they begin by teaching village women about germs and hygiene. They then trace the women's current health problems such as incontinence to female circumcision. When enough support has been gained, an entire village will publicly abandon the practice. As other villages do the same, the lack of circumcision no longer remains an obstacle to marriage.

Sources: As cited, and Lightfoot-Klein 1989; Merwine 1993; Chalkley 1997; Tuhus-Dubrow 2007; UNIFEM 2008; Lazaro 2011; Sacirbey 2012.

For Your Consideration

➤ Do you think that the members of one culture have the right to judge the customs of another culture as inferior or wrong and to then try to get rid of them? If so, under what circumstances? What makes us right and them wrong?

➤ Let's go further. Some are trying to ban the circumcision of boys. Already, one court in Germany has ruled that the circumcision of boys "amounts to bodily harm even if the parents consent to the circumcision" ("German Court . . . " 2012). Do you think the same principle should apply to both female and male circumcision? Why or why not?

feminism the philosophy that men and women should be politically, economically, and socially equal; organized activities on behalf of this principle

The "first wave" of the U.S. women's movement met enormous opposition. The women in this 1920 photo had just been released after serving two months in jail for picketing the White House. Lucy Burns, mentioned on this page, is the second woman on the left. Alice Paul, who was placed in solitary confinement and is a subject of this 1920 protest, is featured in the photo circle of early female sociologists in Chapter 1, page 9.

Gender Inequality in the United States

As we review gender inequality in the United States, let's begin by taking a brief look at how change in this vital area of social life came about.

Fighting Back: The Rise of Feminism

In the early history of the United States, the second-class status of women was taken for granted. A husband and wife were legally one person—him (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986). Women could not vote, buy property in their own names, make legal contracts, or serve on juries. How could relationships have changed so much in the last hundred years that these examples sound like fiction?

A central lesson of conflict theory is that power yields privilege. Like a magnet, power draws society's best resources to the elite. Because men tenaciously held onto their privileges and used social institutions to maintain their dominance, basic rights for women came only through prolonged and bitter struggle.

Feminism—the view that biology is not destiny, that stratification by gender is wrong and should be resisted, and that men and women should be equal—met with strong opposition, both by men who had privilege to lose and by women who accepted their status as morally correct. In 1894, for example, Jeannette Gilder said that women should not have the right to vote: "Politics is too public, too wearing, and too unfitted to the nature of women" (Crossen 2003).

Feminists, known at that time as suffragists, struggled against such views. In 1916, they founded the National Woman's Party, and in 1917, they began to picket the White House. After picketing for six months, the women were arrested. Hundreds were sent to prison, including Lucy Burns, a leader of the National Woman's Party. The extent to which these women had threatened male privilege is demonstrated by how they were treated in prison.

Two men brought in Dorothy Day [the editor of a periodical that promoted women's rights], twisting her arms above her head. Suddenly they lifted her and brought her body down twice over the back of an iron bench. . . . They had been there a few minutes when Mrs. Lewis, all doubled over like a sack of flour, was thrown in. Her head struck the iron bed and she fell to the floor senseless. As for Lucy Burns, they handcuffed her wrists and fastened the handcuffs over [her] head to the cell door. (Cowley 1969)

This *first wave* of the women's movement had a radical branch that wanted to reform all the institutions of society and a conservative branch whose goal was to win the vote for women (Freedman 2001). The conservative branch dominated, and after winning the right to vote in 1920, the movement basically dissolved.

Inequality continued, of course, and even social science was part of the problem. In what is historically humorous, male social scientists paraded themselves as experts on the essence of womanhood. Here is what a renowned psychologist wrote in the 1960s, the paternalism oozing out of his well-intentioned statement: "We must start with the realization that, as much as we want women to be good scientists or engineers, they want first and foremost to be womanly companions of men and to be mothers" (Bettelheim 1965:15 in Eagly et al. 2012).

This man knew what women wanted—and in the 1960s, almost everyone else made the same assumption. From infancy, women were immersed in this idea that their purpose in life was to be "womanly companions of men and mothers." Even children's books reinforced such thinking, as you can see from Figure 10.1.

Reared with this idea, most women thought of work as a temporary activity intended to fill the time between completing school—usually high school—and getting married (Chafetz 1990). Then, as more women took jobs, they began to regard them as careers. This fundamental shift in perspective ushered in huge discontent. Women compared their working conditions with those of men, and they didn't like what they saw. The result

FIGURE 10.1   Teaching Gender

Mother and Sally

Mother can sew.
Jane can sew.

"I will help," said Dick.
"I will help you with the pigs."

Father

The "Dick and Jane" readers were the top selling readers in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. In addition to reading, they taught "gender messages." What gender message do you see here?

What gender lesson is being taught here?

Besides learning words like "pigs" (relevant at that historical period), boys and girls also learned that rough outside work was for men.

What does this page teach children other than how to read the word "Father"? (Look to the left to see what Jane and Mother are doing.)

Source: From *Dick and Jane: Fun with Our Family,* Illustrations © copyright 1951, 1979, and *Dick and Jane: We Play Outside,* copyright © 1965, Pearson Education, Inc., published by Scott, Foresman and Company. Used with permission.

was a *second wave* of protest against gender inequalities, roughly from the 1960s to the 1980s (Eagly et al. 2012). The goals of this second wave (which continues today) were broad, ranging from raising women's pay to changing policies on violence against women and legalizing abortion.

About 1990, the second wave gradually merged into a *third wave* (Byers and Crocker 2012). This current wave has many divisions, but three main aspects are apparent. The first is a greater focus on the problems of women in the Least Industrialized Nations (Spivak 2000; Hamid 2006). Women there are fighting battles against conditions long since overcome by women in the Most Industrialized Nations. The second is a criticism of the values that dominate work and society. Some feminists argue that competition, toughness, calloused emotions, and independence represent "male" qualities and need to be replaced with cooperation, connection, openness, and interdependence (England 2000). A third aspect is an emphasis on women's sexual pleasure (Swigonski and Reheim 2011).

Sharp disagreements have arisen among feminists (Kantor 2013). Some center on male–female relationships. Some feminists, for example, say that to get ahead at work, women should use their "erotic capital," their sexual attractiveness and seductiveness. Other feminists deplore this as a denial of women's ability to compete with men and a betrayal of the equality women have fought for (Hakim 2010).

Although U.S. women enjoy fundamental rights today, gender inequality continues to play a central role in social life. Let's first consider gender inequality in health care.

Gender Inequality in Health Care

Medical researchers were perplexed. Reports were coming in from all over the country: Women were twice as likely as men to die after coronary bypass surgery. Researchers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles checked their own records. They found that of 2,300 coronary bypass patients, 4.6 percent of the women died as a result of the surgery, compared with 2.6 percent of the men.

The researchers faced a sociological puzzle. To solve it, they first turned to biology (Bishop 1990). In coronary bypass surgery, a blood vessel is taken from one part of the body and stitched to an artery on the surface of the heart. Perhaps the surgery was more difficult to do on women because of their smaller arteries. To find out, researchers measured the amount of time that surgeons kept patients on the heart-lung machine. They were surprised to learn that women spent *less* time on the machine than men. This indicated that the surgery was not more difficult to perform on women.

As the researchers probed further, a surprising answer unfolded: unintended sexual discrimination. When women complained of chest pains, their doctors took them only *one tenth as seriously* as when men made the same complaints. How do we know this? Doctors were *ten* times more likely to give men exercise stress tests and radioactive heart scans. They also sent men to surgery on the basis of abnormal stress tests, but they waited until women showed clear-cut symptoms of heart disease before sending them to surgery. Patients with more advanced heart disease are more likely to die during and after heart surgery.

Although these findings have been publicized, the problem continues (Jackson et al. 2011). Perhaps as more women become physicians, the situation will change, since female doctors are more sensitive to women's health problems (Tabenkin et al. 2010). For example, they are more likely to order Pap smears and mammograms (Lurie et al. 1993). In addition, as more women join the faculties of medical schools, we can expect women's health problems to receive more attention in the training of physicians. Even this might not do it, however, as women, too, hold our cultural stereotypes.

In contrast to unintentional sexism in heart surgery, there is a type of surgery that is a blatant form of discrimination against women. This is the focus of the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Cold-Hearted Surgeons and Their Women Victims

While doing participant observation in a hospital, sociologist Sue Fisher (1986) was surprised to hear surgeons recommend total hysterectomy (removal of both the uterus and the ovaries) *when no cancer was present*. When she asked why, the male doctors explained that the uterus and ovaries are "potentially disease producing." They also said that these organs are unnecessary after the childbearing years, so why not remove them? Doctors who reviewed hysterectomies confirmed this gender-biased practice. *Ninety percent* of hysterectomies are avoidable. Only ten percent involve cancer (Costa 2011).

Greed is a powerful motivator in many areas of social life, and it rears its ugly head in surgical sexism (Domingo and Pellicer 2009). Surgeons make money when they do hysterectomies. The more hysterectomies they do, the more money they make. Since women, to understate the matter, are reluctant to part with these organs, surgeons have to "sell" this operation. Here is how one resident explained the "hard sell" to sociologist Diana Scully (1994):

You have to look for your surgical procedures; you have to go after patients. Because no one is crazy enough to come and say, "Hey, here I am. I want you to operate on me." You have to sometimes convince the patient that she is really sick—if she is, of course [laughs], and that she is better off with a surgical procedure.

Used-car salespeople would love to have the powerful sales weapon that surgeons have at their disposal: To "convince" a woman to have this surgery, the doctor puts on a serious face and tells her that the examination has turned up *fibroids* in her uterus—and these lumps might turn into *cancer*. This statement is often sufficient to get the woman to buy the surgery. She starts to picture herself lying at death's door, her sorrowful family gathered at her death bed. Then the used car salesperson—I mean, the surgeon—moves in to clinch the sale. Keeping a serious face and displaying an "I-know-how-you-feel" look, the surgeon starts to make arrangements for the surgery. What the surgeon withholds is the rest of the truth—that uterine fibroids are common, that they usually do *not* turn into cancer, and that the patient has several alternatives to surgery.

In case it is difficult to see how this is sexist, let's change the context just a little. Let's suppose that the income of some female surgeon depends on selling a specialized operation. To sell it, she systematically suggests to older men the benefits of castration—since "those organs are no longer necessary, and might cause disease."

For Your Consideration

→ Hysterectomies have become so common that by age 60, *one of three* U.S. women has had her uterus surgically removed (Rabin 2013). Why do you think that surgeons are so quick to operate? How can women find alternatives to surgery?

## Gender Inequality in Education

The Past.

Until 1832, women were not allowed to attend college with men. When women were admitted to colleges attended by men—first at Oberlin College in Ohio—they had to wash the male students' clothing, clean their rooms, and serve them their meals (Flexner 1971/1999).

How the times have changed—so much so that this quote sounds like it is a joke. But there is more. The men who controlled education were bothered by female organs. They said that women's minds were dominated by their organs, making women less qualified

## FIGURE 10.2   Changes in College Enrollment, by Sex

What percentages of U.S. college students are female and male?
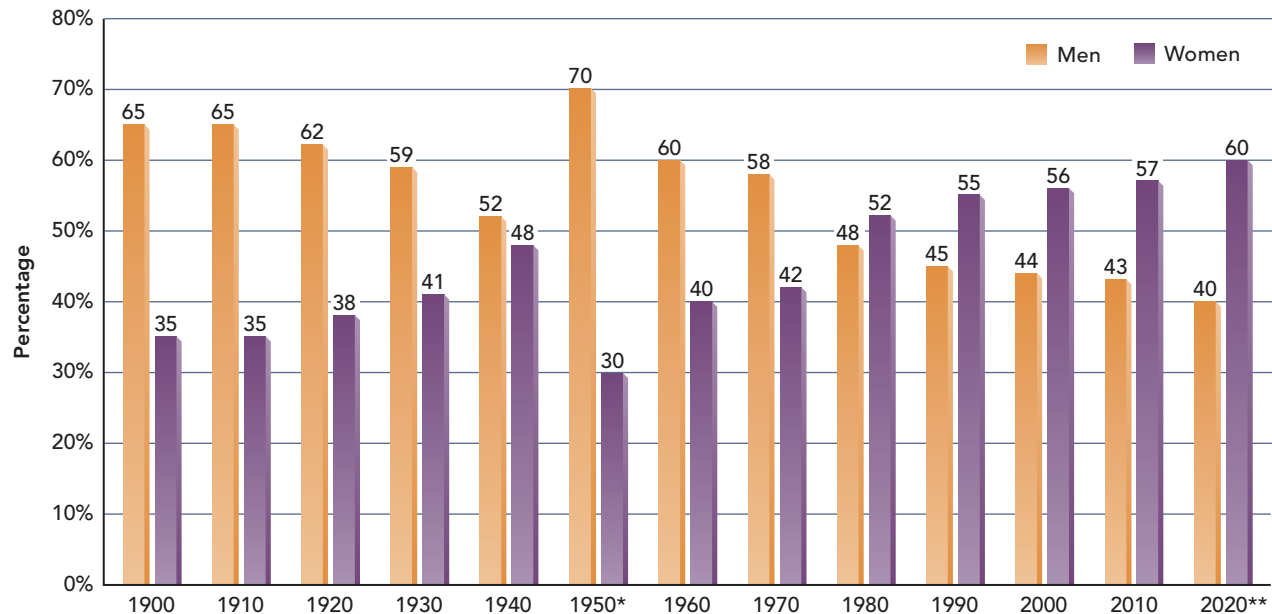
*This sharp drop in women's enrollment occurred when large numbers of male soldiers returned from World War II and attended college under the new GI Bill of Rights.
**Author's estimate.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1938:Table 114; 1959:Table 158; 1991:Table 261; 2013:Table 278.

FIGURE 10.3   College Students, by Sex and Race–Ethnicity
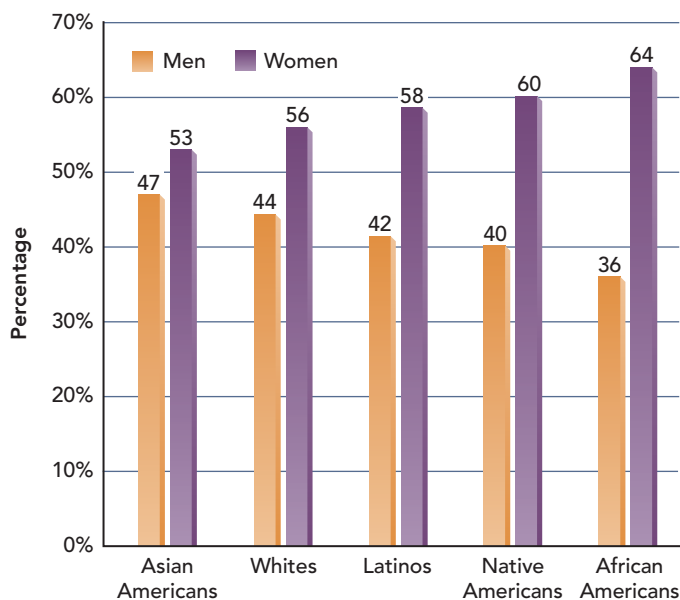
Note: This figure can be confusing. To read it, ask, What percentage of a particular group in college are men or women? (For example, what percentage of Asian American college students are men or women?)

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 279.

than men for higher education. The men considered menstruation to be a special obstacle to women's success in education: It made women so feeble that they could hardly continue with their schooling, much less anything else in life. Here is how Dr. Edward Clarke, of Harvard University, put it:

> *A girl upon whom Nature, for a limited period and for a definite purpose, imposes so great a physiological task, will not have as much power left for the tasks of school, as the boy of whom Nature requires less at the corresponding epoch. (Andersen 1988)*

Because women are so much weaker than men, Clarke urged them to study only one-third as much as young men. And, of course, in their weakened state, they were advised to not study at all during menstruation.

The Change.   Like out-of-fashion clothing, such ideas were discarded. As Figure 10.2 shows, by 1900 one-third of college students were women. Today, far more women than men attend college, but the overall average differs with racial–ethnic groups. As you can see from Figure 10.3, African Americans have the most women relative to men, and Asian Americans the least. Another indication of how extensive the change is: Women now earn 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees and 60 percent of all master's degrees (*Statistical Abstract* 2013:Table 299). As discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page, could it be time to apply affirmative action to men?

Figure 10.4 on the next page illustrates another major change—how women have increased their share of professional

Down-to-Earth **Sociology**
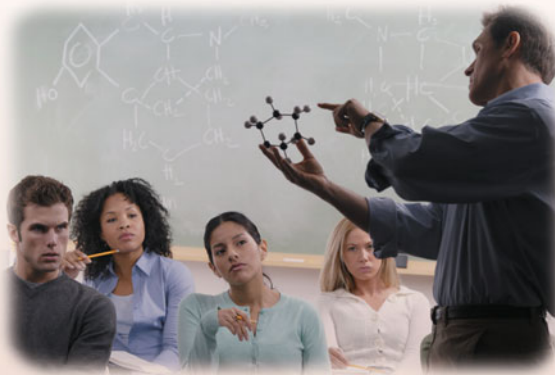
Affirmative Action for Men?

The idea that we might need affirmative action *for men* was first proposed by psychologist Judith Kleinfeld (2002). Many met this suggestion with laughter. After all, men dominate societies around the world, and they have done so for millennia. To think that men would ever need affirmative action seemed humorous at best.

But let's pause, step back, and try to see whether the idea has any merit. Look again at Figures 10.2 and 10.3 on pages 306. Do you see that women have not only caught up with men but have passed them by? Do you see that this applies to all racial–ethnic groups? This is not a temporary situation, like lead cars changing place at the Indy 500. For decades, women have been adding to their share of college enrollment and the degrees they earn.

With colleges open to both women and men, why don't enrollment and degree totals match the relative proportions of women and men in the population (51 percent and 49 percent)? Although no one yet knows the reasons for this—and there are a lot of suggestions being thrown around—some have begun to consider the imbalance a problem searching for a solution. To get closer to a male–female balance, some colleges have begun to reject more highly qualified women (Kingsbury 2007). And to help men adjust to their new minority status, Clark University in Massachusetts has begun a men's support program (Gibbs 2008). Metropolitan Community College in Kansas City is following suit, setting up study groups for men, mentoring programs for men, and students associations for men (Rosin 2010).

With fewer men than women in college, is it time to consider affirmative action for men?

For Your Consideration

➔ Why do you think that men have fallen behind? What implications could this have for the future of society? Do you think anything should be done about this imbalance? If so, why? And if so, what?

FIGURE 10.4   Gender Changes in Professional Degrees
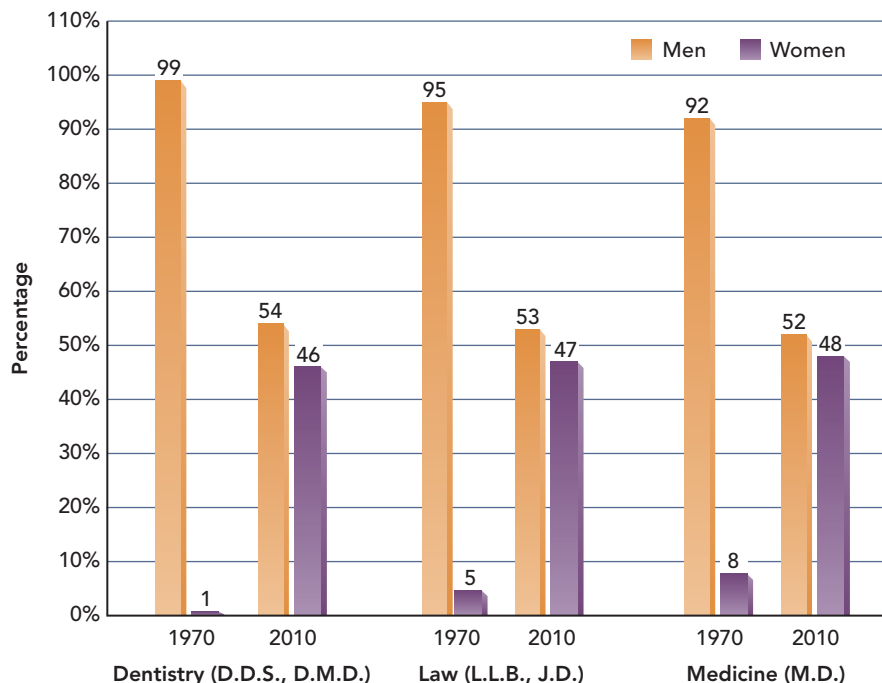
Source: By the author. Based on *Digest of Education Statistics* 2007:Table 269; *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 304.

degrees. The greatest change is in dentistry: In 1970, across the entire United States, only 34 women earned degrees in dentistry. Today, that total has jumped to 2,300 a year. As you can also see, almost as many women as men now become dentists, lawyers, and physicians. It is likely that women will soon outnumber men in earning these professional degrees.

Gender Tracking.   With such extensive change, it would seem that gender equality has been achieved, or at least almost so. In some instances—as with the changed sex ratio in college—we even have a new form of gender inequality. If we look closer, however, we can see *gender tracking*. That is, college degrees tend to follow gender, which reinforces male–female distinctions. Here are two extremes: Men earn 94 percent of the associate's degrees in the "masculine" field of construction trades, while women are awarded 95 percent of the associate's degrees in the "feminine" field of "family and consumer sciences" (*Statistical Abstract* 2013:Table 302). Because gender socialization gives men and women different orientations to life, they enter college with gender-linked aspirations. Socialization—not some presumed innate characteristic—channels men and women into different educational paths.

10.4 Explain reasons for the pay gap; discuss the glass ceiling and sexual harassment.

Gender Inequality in the Workplace

To examine the work setting is to make visible basic relations between men and women. Let's begin with one of the most remarkable areas of gender inequality at work, the pay gap.

The Pay Gap

After college, you might like to take a few years off, travel around Europe, sail the oceans, or maybe sit on a beach in some South American paradise and drink piña coladas. But chances are, you are going to go to work instead. Since you have to work, how would you like to make an extra $688,000 on your job? If this sounds appealing, read on. I'm going to reveal how you can make an extra $1,435 a month between the ages of 25 and 65.

Historical Background.   First, let's get a broad background to help us understand today's situation. One of the chief characteristics of the U.S. workforce is the steady increase in the numbers of women who work for wages outside the home. Figure 10.5

FIGURE 10.5   Proportion of Women and Men in the U.S. Labor Force
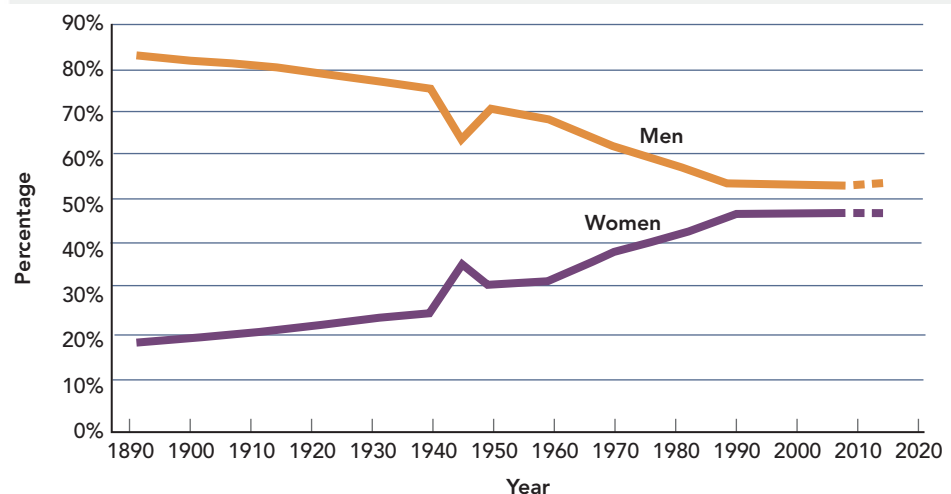
Note: Pre-1940 totals include women 14 and over; totals for 1940 and after are for women 16 and over. Broken lines are the author's projections.

Sources: By the author. Based on Women's Bureau of the United States 1969:10; *Manpower Report to the President*, 1971:203, 205; Mills and Palumbo 1980:6, 45; *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 597.

shows that in 1890, about one of every five paid workers was a woman. By 1940, this ratio had grown to one of four; by 1960 to one of three; and today, it is almost one of two. As you can see from this figure, 53 percent of U.S. workers are men, and 47 percent are women. During the next few years, we can expect little change in this ratio.

Geographical Factors.   Women who work for wages are not distributed evenly throughout the United States. From the Social Map below, you can see that where a woman lives makes a difference in how likely she is to work outside the home. Why is there such a clustering among the states? The geographical patterns that you see on this map reflect regional subcultural differences about which we currently have little understanding.

The "Testosterone Bonus."   Now, back to how you can make an extra $688,000 at work—maybe even more. You might be wondering if this is hard to do. Actually, it is simple for some and impossible for others. As Figure 10.7 on the next page shows, all you have to do is be born a male. If we compare full-time workers, based on current differences in earnings, this is how much more money the *average male* can expect to earn over the course of his career. Now, if you want to boost that difference to $28,900 a year for a whopping career total of $1,155,000, be both a male and a college graduate. Hardly any single factor pinpoints gender discrimination better than these totals. As you can see from Figure 10.7, the pay gap shows up at *all* levels of education.

For college students, the gender gap in pay begins with the first job after graduation. You might know of a particular woman who was offered a higher salary than most men in her class, but she would be an exception. On average, employers start men out at higher salaries than women, and women never catch up from the men's starting "testosterone bonus" (Carter 2010; Weinberger 2011; Smith 2012). Depending on your sex, then, you will either benefit from the pay gap or be victimized by it.

FIGURE 10.6   Women in the Workforce
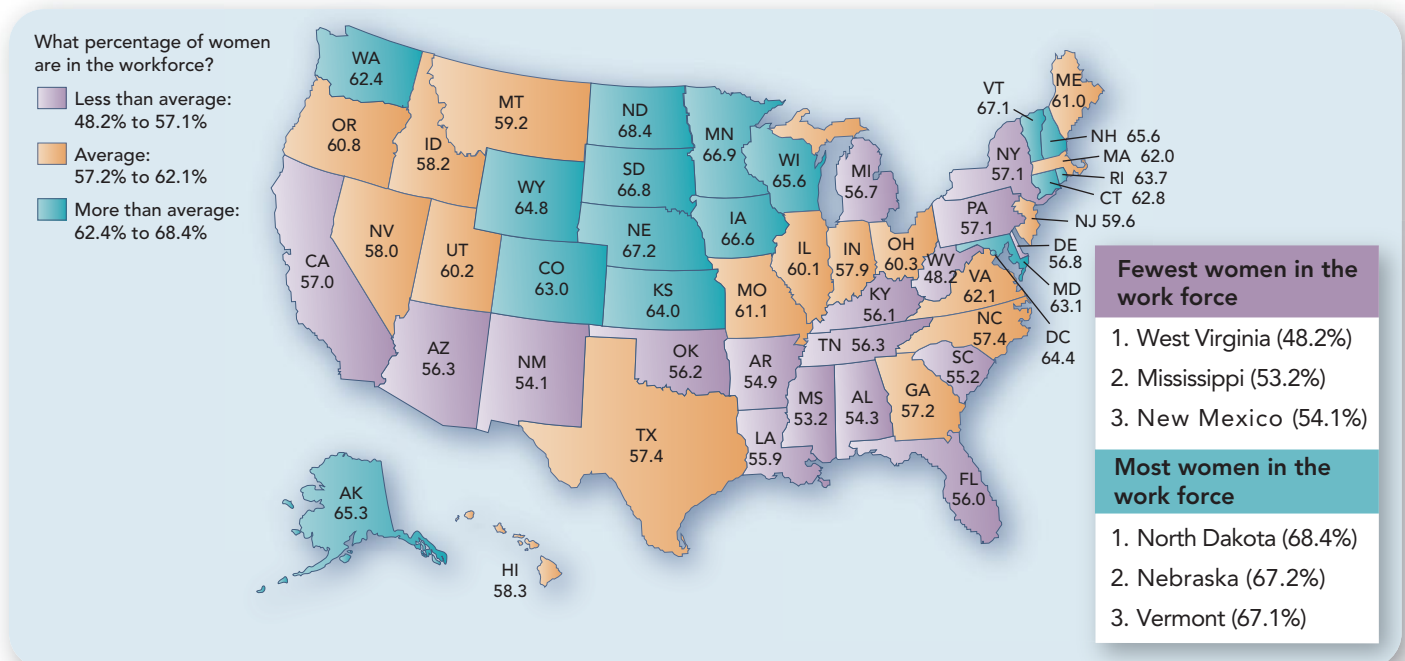
Note: This is the women's *labor participation rate*, the proportion of women of working age who are in the labor force.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 604.

FIGURE 10.7   The Gender Pay Gap, by Education[1]
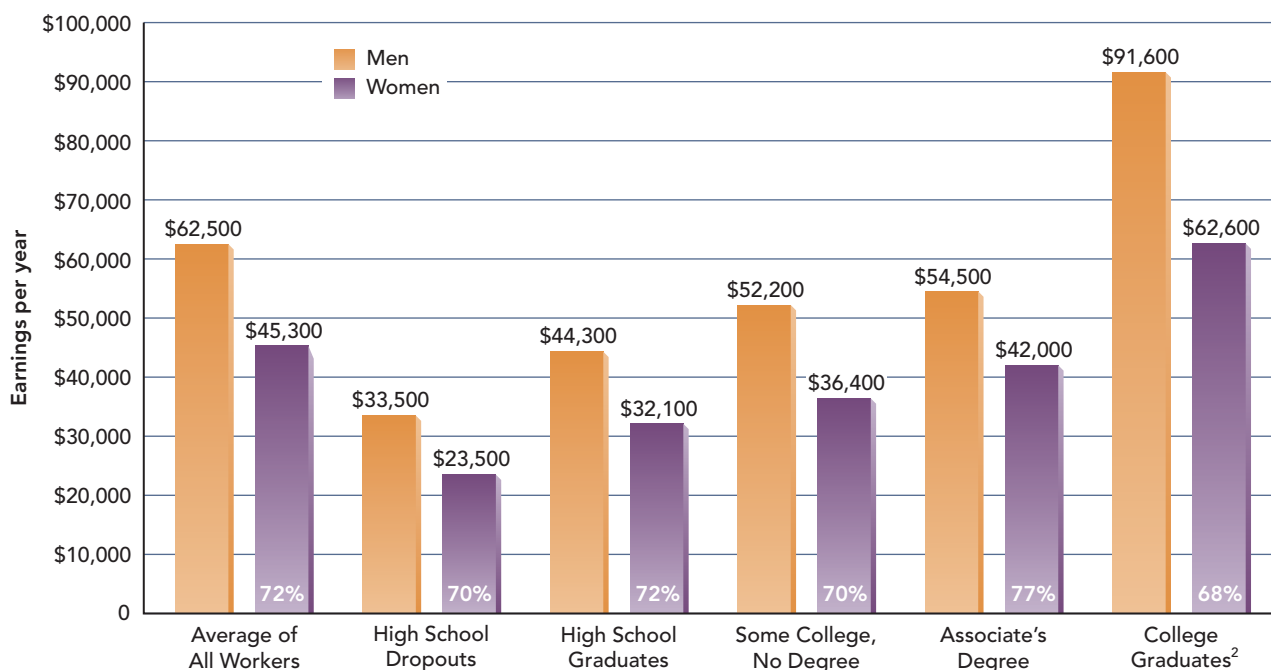
[1]Full-time workers in all fields. Dollars rounded to the nearest hundred. The percentage at the bottom of each purple bar indicates the women's average percentage of the men's income.
[2]Bachelor's and all higher degrees, including professional degrees.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 717.

The pay gap is so great that U.S. women who work full time average *only 72 percent* of what men are paid. As you can see from Figure 10.8 on the next page, the pay gap used to be even worse. And it isn't just the United States. A gender gap in pay occurs in *all* industrialized nations.

Reasons for the Gender Pay Gap.   What logic can underlie the gender pay gap? As we just saw, college degrees are gender linked, so perhaps this gap is due to career choices. Maybe women are more likely to choose lower-paying jobs, such as teaching grade school, while men are more likely to go into better-paying fields, such as business and engineering. Actually, this is true, and researchers have found that about *half* of the gender pay gap is due to such factors. And the balance? It consists of a combination of gender discrimination (Jacobs 2003; Roth 2003) and what is called the "child penalty"—women missing out on work experience and opportunities while they care for children (Hundley 2001; Wilde et al. 2010).

Another reason has also become apparent. Let's look at this in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on page 312.

The CEO Gap.   As a final indication of the extent of the gap in gender pay (and power), consider this. Of the nation's top 500 corporations (the so-called Fortune 500), only 18 are headed by women (Bosker 2012). This low number is a large improvement! Just seven women were CEOs of these companies in 2003.

I examined the names of the CEOs of the 350 largest U.S. corporations, and I found that your best chance to reach the top is to be named (in this order) John, Robert, James, William, or Charles. Edward, Lawrence, and Richard are also advantageous names.

As the glass ceiling slowly cracks, women are gaining entry into the top positions of society. Shown here is Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo! as she announces Yahoo's purchase of Tumblr.

FIGURE 10.8 **The Gender Gap Over Time: What Percentage of Men's Income Do Women Earn?**
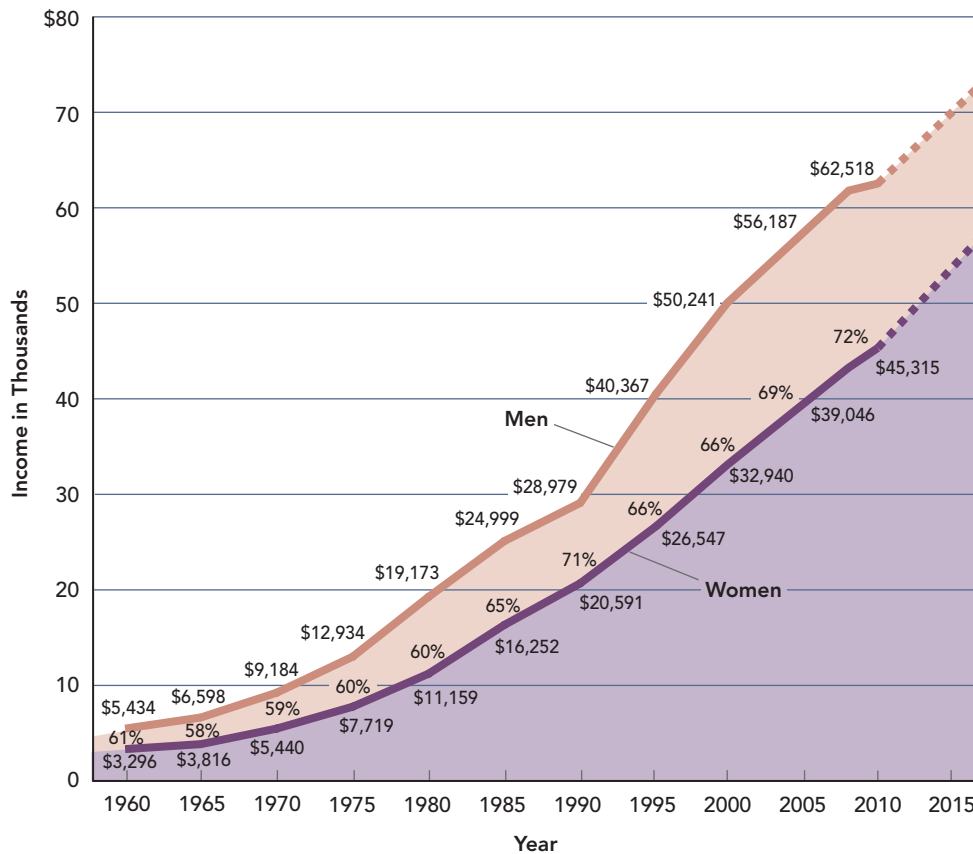
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1995:Table 739; 2002:Table 666; 2008:Table 681; 2013:Table 717, and earlier years. Broken lines indicate the author's estimate.

Amber, Katherine, Leticia, and Maria apparently draw a severe penalty. Naming your baby girl John or Robert might seem a little severe, but it could help her reach the top. (I say this only slightly tongue in cheek. One of the few women to head a Fortune 500 company—before she was fired and given $21 million severance pay—had a man's first name: Carleton Fiorina of Hewlett-Packard. Carleton's first name is actually Cara, but knowing what she was facing in the highly competitive business world, she dropped this feminine name to go by her masculine middle name.)

Is the Glass Ceiling Cracking?

"First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes flex time and a baby carriage."
—Said by a supervisor at Novartis who refused to hire women (Carter 2010)

This supervisor's statement reflects blatant discrimination. Most gender discrimination in the workplace, however, seems to be unintentional, with much of it based on gender stereotypes.

Apart from cases of discrimination, then, what keeps women from breaking through the **glass ceiling**, the mostly invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching the executive suite? Stereotypes are part of the reason (Isaac 2012). It is common for men, who dominate leadership, to have the stereotype that women are good at "support" but less capable than men of leadership. They steer women into human resources or public relations. This keeps many away from the "pipelines" that lead to the top of a

glass ceiling the mostly invisible barrier that keeps women from advancing to the top levels at work

Down-to-Earth **Sociology**

Applying Sociology: How to Get a Higher Salary

It will take years of united effort to overcome the powerful structural factors that hold down women's pay at work. But to increase your own pay, you don't have to wait for this to happen.

Let's apply sociology to see what steps you can take. As you just read, when college students take their first jobs, most women start at lower salaries than men do. Apart from the structural reasons such as men being perceived as more valuable workers, another factor is that women aren't as good as men at negotiating salaries. Women are more likely to accept the first offer, or to negotiate a little and be happy with the small increase that comes with a second offer (Babcock and Laschever 2008; Bennett 2012).

Why be satisfied with less? If you are a woman, remember that the first offer is usually negotiable. The hiring agent will be happy if you accept the offer, but usually is willing to add considerably to it if you negotiate strongly. Negotiating is like riding a bike. It is simply a skill that you can learn. So learn it. Read books on how to negotiate. Also, practice with a partner. Role-play until you are good at it.

Then, during your career, continue to promote yourself. You might think that the system will automatically reward hard work. It probably should, but things don't work this way in real life. Don't be afraid to bring your accomplishments to the attention of your supervisors. You need to show them that you deserve higher raises. If you don't, you run the risk of what

you have done getting lost in the shuffle of the many accomplishments of the workers around you.

On top of this, be bold and ask for larger raises. If this makes you feel uncomfortable, then overcome that discomfort. Again, read books on how to negotiate, and practice your negotiating skills with others. (And copy this page and put it in practice.)

Does this application of sociology apply only to women? Of course not. Even though men on average are less reluctant to bring their accomplishments to the attention of supervisors and to ask for and negotiate salaries, many men also hesitate to do so. They can use these same techniques to overcome their reluctance. All workers, male and female, can hone up on their negotiating skills. It's worth the time you put into improving this skill. It can pay off in your weekly paycheck.

Sociology isn't something to be locked up in an ivory tower. Sociology is about life. As you can see, you can even apply its insights into achieving success at work and increasing your standard of living.

For Your Consideration

➤ How do you think you can improve your negotiating skills?

➤ For practice, what partner do you think you should choose? How can you evaluate what you are learning?

➤ What other insights of sociology do you think you can apply to your career?

company—marketing, sales, and production—positions that produce profits for the company and bonuses for the managers (Hymowitz 2004; DeCrow 2005).

Another reason that the glass ceiling is so strong is that women lack mentors—successful executives who take an interest in them and teach them the ropes. Lack of a mentor is no trivial matter, since mentors can provide opportunities to develop leadership skills that open the door to the executive suite (Hymowitz 2007; Yakaboski and Reinert 2011).

Sexual Harassment—and Worse

Sexual harassment—unwelcome sexual attention at work or at school, which may affect job or school performance or create a hostile environment—was not recognized as a problem until the 1970s. Before this, a woman considered unwanted sexual comments, touches, looks, and pressure to have sex as a personal matter, something between her and some "turned on" man—or an obnoxious one.

With the prodding of feminists, women began to perceive unwanted sexual advances at work and school as part of a *structural* problem. That is, they began to realize that the issue was more than a man here or there doing obnoxious things because he was attracted to a woman; rather, men were using their positions of authority to pressure women for sex.

sexual harassment the abuse of one's position of authority to force unwanted sexual demands on someone

Labels and Perception.   As symbolic interactionists stress, labels affect the way we see things. Because we have the term *sexual harassment*, we perceive actions in a different light than people used to. We are now more apt to perceive the sexual advances of a supervisor toward a worker not as sexual attraction but as a misuse of authority.

Not Just a "Man Thing."   It is important to add that sexual harassment is not just a "man thing." Unlike the past, many women today are in positions of authority, and in those positions, they, too, sexually harass subordinates (McLaughlin et al. 2012). With most authority still vested in men, however, most sexual harassers are men.

Sexual Orientation.   Originally, sexual desire was an element of sexual harassment, but no longer. This changed when the U.S. Supreme Court considered the lawsuit of a homosexual who had been tormented by his supervisors and fellow workers. The Court ruled that sexual desire is not necessary—that sexual harassment laws also apply to homosexuals who are harassed by heterosexuals while on the job (Felsenthal 1998; Ramakrishnan 2011). By extension, the law applies to heterosexuals who are sexually harassed by homosexuals.

Gender and Violence

One of the consistent characteristics of violence in the United States—and the world—is its gender inequality. Globally, females are more likely to be the victims of males, not the other way around. Let's briefly review this almost one-way street in gender violence as it applies to the United States.

Violence against Women

We have already examined violence against women in other cultures; on page 305, we reviewed a form of surgical violence in the United States; and in Chapter 12, we will review violence in the home. Here we briefly review some primary features of gender violence.

Forcible Rape.   The fear of rape is common among U.S. women, a fear that is far from groundless. The U.S. rate is 0.52 per 1,000 females (*Statistical Abstract* 2013:Table 320). If we exclude the very young and women over 50, those who are the least likely rape victims, the rate comes to about 1 per 1,000. This means that 1 of every 1,000 U.S. girls and women between the ages of 12 and 50 is raped *each year*. Despite this high number, women are safer now than they were ten and twenty years ago. The rape rate in 1990 was 50 percent higher than it is today.

Although any woman can be a victim of sexual assault—and victims include babies and elderly women—the typical victim is 16 to 19 years old. As you can see from Table 10.1 on the next page, sexual assault peaks at those ages and then declines.

Women's most common fear seems to be an attack by a stranger—a sudden, violent abduction and rape. However, contrary to the stereotypes that underlie these fears, most victims know their attackers. As you can see from Table 10.2 on the next page, one of three rapes is committed by strangers.

Males are also victims of rape, which is every bit as devastating for them as it is for female victims (Choudhary et al. 2010). The rape of males in jails and prisons is a special problem, sometimes tolerated by guards, at times even encouraged as punishment for prisoners who have given them trouble (Donaldson 1993; Buchanan 2010). A devastating finding is that about as many prisoners are raped by prison staff as by other prisoners (Holland 2012).

"Of course it isn't a case of sexual discrimination. We just don't think you're the right man for the job."

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Although crassly put by the cartoonist, behind the glass ceiling lies this background assumption.

10.5 Summarize violence against women: rape, murder, and violence in the home.

The most common drug used to facilitate date rape is alcohol, not GHB.

TABLE 10.1   Rape Victims

Age	Rate per 1,000 Females
12–15	1.6
16–19	2.7
20–24	2.0
25–34	1.3
35–49	0.8
50–64	0.4
65 and Older	0.1

Sources: By the author. A ten-year average, based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2004:Table 322; 2005:Table 306; 2006:Table 308; 2007:Table 311; 2008: Table 313; 2009:Table 305; 2010:Table 305; 2011:Table 312; 2012:Table 316; 2013:Table 322.

TABLE 10.2   Relationship of Victims and Rapists

Relationship	Percentage
Relative	6%
Known Well	33%
Casual Acquaintance	23%
Stranger	34%
Not Reported	3%

Sources: By the author. A ten-year average, based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2004:Table 323; 2005:Table 307; 2006:Table 311; 2007: Table 315; 2008:Table 316; 2009:Table 306; 2010:Table 306; 2011:Table 313; 2012:Table 317; 2013:Table 323.

Date (Acquaintance) Rape.   What has shocked many about date rape (also known as *acquaintance rape*) are studies showing how common it is (Littleton et al. 2008). Researchers who used a nationally representative sample of women enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities with 1,000 students or more found that 1.7 percent had been raped during the preceding six months. Another 1.1 percent had been victims of attempted rape (Fisher et al. 2000).

Think about how huge these numbers are. With 12 million women enrolled in college, 2.8 percent (1.7 plus 1.1) means that over a quarter of a million college women were victims of rape or of attempted rape *in just the past six months*. (This conclusion assumes that the rate is the same in colleges with fewer than 1,000 students, which has not been verified.)

Murder.   All over the world, men are more likely than women to be killers. Figure 10.9 illustrates this gender pattern in U.S. murders. Note that although females make up about 51 percent of the U.S. population, they don't even come close to making up 51 percent of the nation's killers. As you can see from this figure, when women are murdered, about nine times out of ten the killer is a man.

Violence in the Home.   In the family, too, women are the typical victims. Spouse battering, marital rape, and incest are discussed in Chapter 12, pages 396–397. Two forms of violence against women—honor killings and female circumcision—are discussed on pages 300 and 301.

Feminism and Gendered Violence.   Feminist sociologists have been especially effective in bringing violence against women to the public's attention. Some use symbolic interactionism, pointing out that to associate strength and virility with violence—as is done in many cultures—is to promote violence. Others employ conflict theory. They argue that men are losing power, and that some men turn violently against women as a way to reassert their declining power and status (Reiser 1999; Meltzer 2002; Xie et al. 2011).

Solutions.   There is no magic bullet for the problem of gendered violence, but to be effective, any solution must break the connection between violence and masculinity. This would require an educational program that encompasses schools, churches, homes, and the media. Given the gunslinging heroes of the Wild West and other American icons, as well as the

FIGURE 10.9   Killers and Their Victims
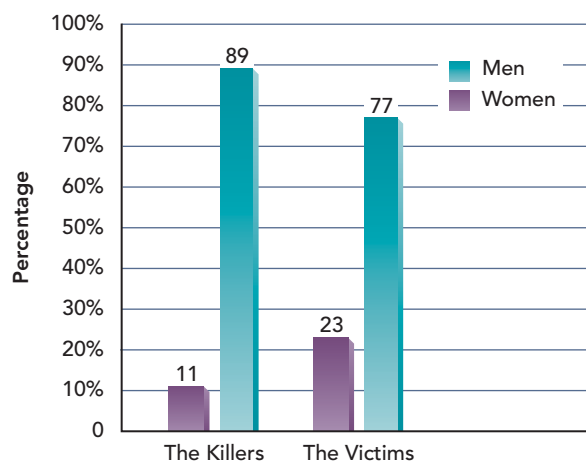
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Tables 317, 338.

violent messages that are so prevalent in the mass media, including video games, it is difficult to be optimistic that a change will come any time soon.

Our next topic, women in politics, however, gives us much more reason for optimism.

The Changing Face of Politics

Women could take over the United States! Think about it. There are eight million more women than men of voting age. But look at Table 10.3. Although women voters greatly outnumber men voters, men greatly outnumber women in political office. The remarkable gains women have made in recent elections can take our eye off the broader picture.

Since 1789, about 2,000 men have served in the U.S. Senate. And how many women? Only 44, including the 20 current senators. Not until 1992 was the first African American woman (Carol Brown) elected to the U.S. Senate. It took until 2013 for the first Asian American woman (Mazie Hirono) to be sworn in to the Senate. No Latina has yet been elected to the Senate (National Women's Political Caucus 1998, 2013; *Statistical Abstract* 2013:Table 421).

We are in the midst of fundamental change. In 2002, Nancy Pelosi was the first woman to be elected by her colleagues as minority leader of the House of Representatives. Five years later, in 2007, they chose her as the first female Speaker of the House. These posts made her the most powerful woman ever in Congress. Another significant event occurred in 2008 when Hillary Clinton came within a hair's breadth of becoming the presidential nominee of the Democratic party. That same year, Sarah Palin was chosen as the Republican vice-presidential candidate. We can also note that more women are becoming corporate executives, and, as indicated in Figure 10.4 (on page 307), more women are also becoming lawyers. In these positions, women are traveling more and making statewide and national contacts. Along with other social changes that give women more freedom, such as more people seeing child care as the responsibility of both mother and father, it is only a matter of time until a woman occupies the Oval Office.

Hillary Clinton broke through the glass ceiling in politics when she was elected senator from New York. She also came close to being the Democratic nominee for president. She is shown here in her position as Secretary of State, meeting with Arab leaders in United Arab Emirates.

TABLE 10.3	U.S. Women in Political Office	
	Offices Held by Women (Percentage)	**Offices Held By Women (Number)**
National Office		
U.S. Senate	20%	20
U.S. House of Representatives	18%	77
State Office		
Governors	10%	5
Lt. Governors	22%	11
Attorneys General	16%	8
Secretaries of State	24%	12
Treasurers	16%	8
State Auditors	12%	6
State Legislators	24%	1,779

Source: Center for American Women and Politics 2013.

Glimpsing the Future—with Hope

Women's fuller participation in the decision-making processes of our social institutions has shattered stereotypes that tended to limit females to "feminine" activities and push males into "masculine" ones. As structural barriers continue to fall and more activities are degendered, both males and females will have greater freedom to pursue activities that are more compatible with their abilities and desires as individuals.

As females and males develop a new consciousness both of their capacities and of their potential, relationships will change. Distinctions between the sexes will not disappear, but there is no reason for biological differences to be translated into social inequalities. The potential, as sociologist Alison Jaggar (1990) observed, is for gender equality to become less a goal than a background condition for living in society.

Inequalities of Aging

In 1928, Charles Hart, who was working on his Ph.D. in anthropology, did fieldwork with the Tiwi people, who live on an island off the northern coast of Australia. Because every Tiwi belongs to a clan, they assigned Hart to the bird (Jabijabui) clan and told him that a particular woman was his mother. Hart described the woman as "toothless, almost blind, withered." He added that she was "physically quite revolting and mentally rather senile." He then recounted this remarkable event:

> Toward the end of my time on the islands an incident occurred that surprised me because it suggested that some of them had been taking my presence in the kinship system much more seri-ously than I had thought. I was approached by a group of about eight or nine senior men. . . . They were the senior members of the Jabijabui clan and they had decided among themselves that the time had come to get rid of the decrepit old woman who had first called me son and whom I now called mother. . . . As I knew, they said, it was Tiwi custom, when an old woman became too feeble to look after herself, to "cover her up." This could only be done by her sons and brothers and all of them had to agree beforehand, since once it was done, they did not want any dissension among the brothers or clansmen, as that might lead to a feud. My "mother" was now completely blind, she was constantly falling over logs or into fires, and they, her senior clansmen, were in agreement that she would be better out of the way. Did I agree?
>
> I already knew about "covering up." The Tiwi, like many other hunting and gathering peoples, sometimes got rid of their ancient and decrepit females. The method was to dig a hole in the ground in some lonely place, put the old woman in the hole and fill it in with earth until only her head was showing. Everybody went away for a day or two and then went back to the hole to discover to their great surprise, that the old woman was dead, having been too feeble to raise her arms from the earth. Nobody had "killed" her; her death in Tiwi eyes was a natural one. She had been alive when her relatives last saw her. I had never seen it done, though I knew it was the custom, so I asked my brothers if it was necessary for me to attend the "covering up."
>
> They said no and that they would do it, but only after they had my agreement. Of course I agreed, and a week or two later we heard in our camp that my "mother" was dead, and we all wailed and put on the trimmings of mourning. (C. W. M. Hart in Hart and Pilling 1979:125–126.)

10.7 Understand how attitudes toward the elderly vary around the world; explain how industrialization led to a graying globe.

Aging in Global Perspective

We won't deal with the question of whether it was moral or ethical for Hart to agree that the old woman should be "covered up." What is of interest for our purposes is how the Tiwi treated their frail elderly—or, more specifically, their frail *female* elderly.

You probably noticed that the Tiwi "covered up" only old women. As was noted earlier, females are discriminated against throughout the world. As this incident makes evident, in some places that discrimination extends even to death.

Every society must deal with the problem of people growing old, and of some becoming frail. Although few societies choose to bury old people alive, all societies must decide how to allocate limited resources among their citizens. With the percentage of the population that is old increasing in many nations, these decisions are generating tensions between the generations.

Extremes of Attitudes and Practices

The way the Tiwi treated frail elderly women reflects one extreme of how societies cope with aging. Another extreme, one that reflects a sharply different attitude, is illustrated by the Abkhasians, an agricultural people who live in Georgia, a republic of the former Soviet Union. The Abkhasians pay their elderly high respect and look to them for guidance. They would no more dispense with their elderly by "covering them up" than we would "cover up" a sick child in our culture.

This 80-year old man in a village in Hubei, China, has slowed down, but he has not retired. He is still making rope for straw sandals and remains integrated in his community.

The Abkhasians may be the longest-lived people on Earth. Many claim to live past 100—some beyond 120 and even 130 (Benet 1971; Robbins 2006). Although researchers have concluded that the extreme claims are bogus (Young et al. 2010), government records do indicate that many Abkhasians do live to a very old age.

Three main factors appear to account for their long lives. The first is their diet, which consists of little meat and much fresh fruit, vegetables, garlic, goat cheese, cornmeal, buttermilk, and wine. The second is their lifelong physical activity. They do slow down after age 80, but even after the age of 100, they still work about four hours a day. The third factor—a highly developed sense of community—lies at the very heart of the Abkhasian culture. From childhood, each individual is integrated into a primary group and remains so throughout life. There is no such thing as a nursing home, nor do the elderly live alone. Because they continue to work and contribute to the group's welfare, the elderly aren't a burden to anyone. They don't vegetate, nor do they feel the need to "fill time" with bingo and shuffleboard. In short, the elderly feel no sudden rupture between what they "were" and what they "are."

In Sum: The examples of the Tiwi and the Abkhasians reveal an important sociological principle: Like gender, aging is *socially constructed*. That is, nothing in the nature of aging summons forth any particular viewpoint. Rather, attitudes toward the aged are rooted in society. They differ with groups around the world. As we shall see, even the age at which people are considered old depends not on biology but on culture.
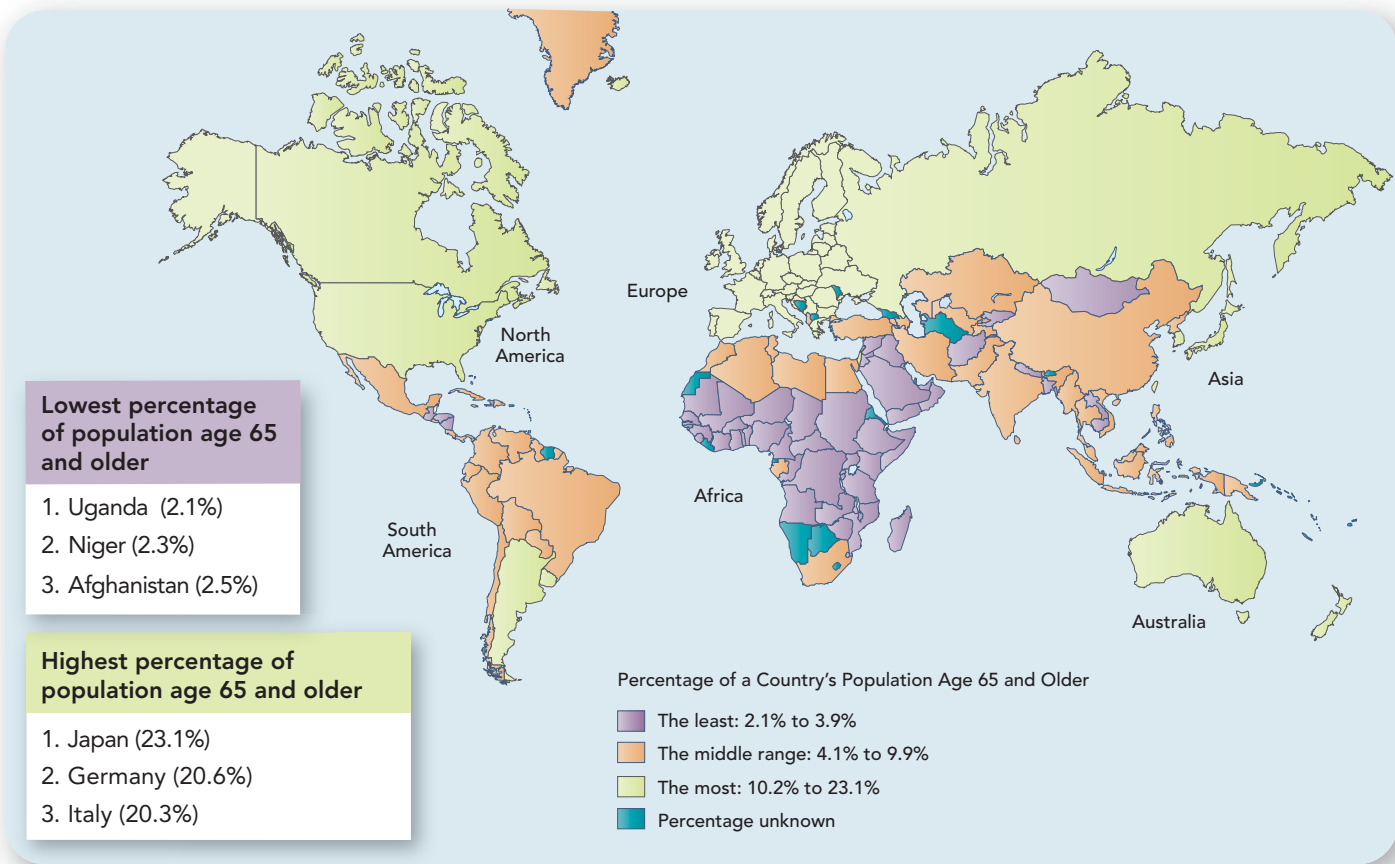
Industrialization and the Graying of the Globe

As was noted in previous chapters, industrialization is occurring worldwide. With industrialization comes a higher standard of living: more food, a purer water supply, better housing, more material goods, and more effective ways of fighting the diseases that kill children. As a result, when a country industrializes, more of its people reach older ages. The Social Map on the next page illustrates this principle.

From this global map, you can see that the industrialized countries have the highest percentage of elderly. The range among nations is broad, from just 1 of 45 citizens in nonindustrialized Uganda to *nine* times more—1 of 4 or 5—in postindustrial Japan

FIGURE 10.10   The Graying of the Globe

Lowest percentage of population age 65 and older

1. Uganda (2.1%)
2. Niger (2.3%)
3. Afghanistan (2.5%)

Highest percentage of population age 65 and older

1. Japan (23.1%)
2. Germany (20.6%)
3. Italy (20.3%)

Percentage of a Country's Population Age 65 and Older

- The least: 2.1% to 3.9%
- The middle range: 4.1% to 9.9%
- The most: 10.2% to 23.1%
- Percentage unknown

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States*; 2013:Table 1350.

(*Statistical Abstract* 2013:Table 1350). In another ten years, *half* the population of Italy and Japan will be older than 50 (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). The graying of the globe is so new that *two-thirds of all people who have ever passed age 50 in the history of the world are alive today* (Zaslow 2003).

As the number of elderly continues to grow, analysts have become alarmed about future liabilities for their care. This issue is especially troubling in western Europe and Japan, which have the largest percentage of citizens over age 65. The basic issue is, How can nations provide high-quality care for growing numbers of elderly people without burdening future generations with impossible taxes? Although more and more nations around the world are confronting this issue, no one has found a solution yet.

The Life Span.   Although more people are living to old age, the maximum length of life possible, the **life span**, has not increased. No one knows, however, just what that maximum is. We do know that it is at least 122: This was the well-documented age of Jeanne Louise Calment of France at her death in 1997. If the birth certificate of Tuti Yusupova in Uzbekistan proves to be genuine, which shows her birth year as 1880, then the human life span exceeds even this number by a comfortable margin. It is also likely that advances in genetics will extend the human life span—maybe even to hundreds of years—a topic we will return to later.

life span the maximum length of life of a species; for humans, the longest that a human has lived

FIGURE 10.11	U.S. Life Expectancy by Year of Birth
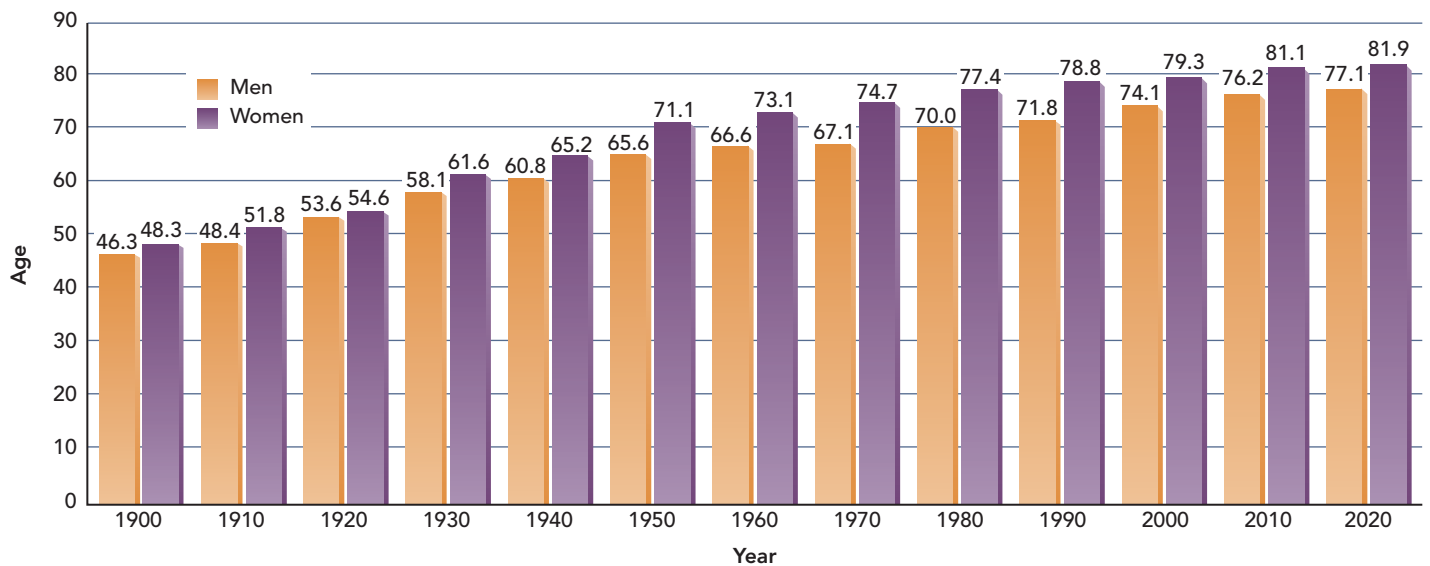
Sources: By the author. Based on *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970,* Bicentennial Edition, Part I, Series B, 107–115; *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 108.

The Graying of America

From Figure 10.11, you can see how the United States is part of this global trend. This figure shows how U.S. **life expectancy**, the number of years people can expect to live, has increased since 1900. To me, and perhaps to you, it is startling to realize that a little over a hundred years ago, the average U.S. woman and man didn't live long enough to celebrate their 50th birthday.

Since then, we've added about *30* years to our life expectancy, and Americans born today can expect to live into their 70s or 80s.

The term **graying of America** refers to this growing percentage of older people in the U.S. population. Look at Figure 10.12 on the next page. In 1900, only 4 percent of Americans were age 65 and older. Today, 13 percent are. The average 65-year-old can expect to live another 19 years. U.S. society has become so "gray" that, as Figure 10.13 shows, the median age has almost *doubled* since 1850. Today, there are 12 million *more* elderly Americans than there are teenagers (*Statistical Abstract* 2013:Tables 11, 107). Despite this vast change, as Figure 10.14 on page 321 shows, the United States ranks just eleventh in life expectancy on a global level.

As anyone who has ever visited Florida knows, the elderly population is not distributed evenly around the country. (As Jerry Seinfeld sardonically noted, "There's a law that when you get old, you've got to move to Florida.") The Social Map on the next page shows how uneven this distribution is.

Let's see the different pictures of aging that emerge when we apply the three theoretical perspectives

life expectancy the number of years that an average person at any age, including newborns, can expect to live

graying of America the growing percentage of older people in the U.S. population

Except for interaction within families, age groups in Western culture are usually kept fairly separate. The idea of having a day care center in the same building as a nursing home breaks this tradition. This photo was taken in Seattle, Washington.
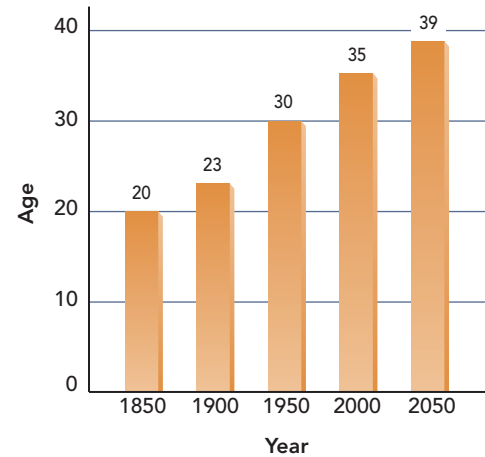
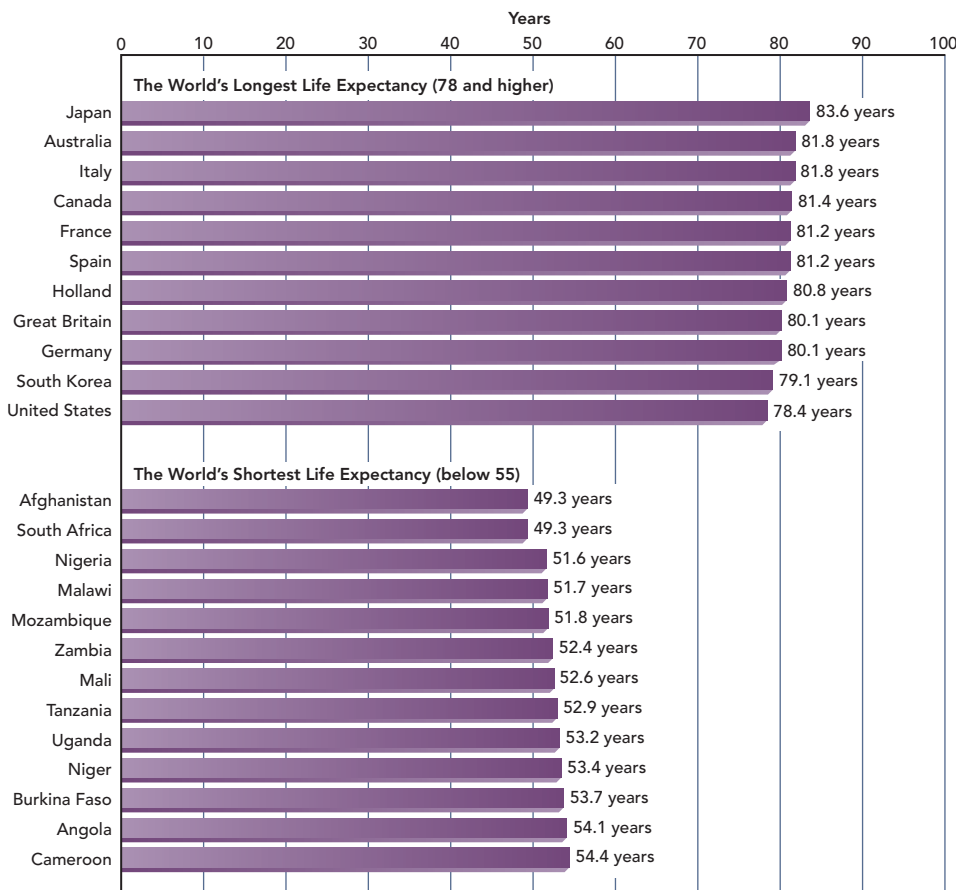## FIGURE 10.12   The Graying of America: Americans Age 65 and Older
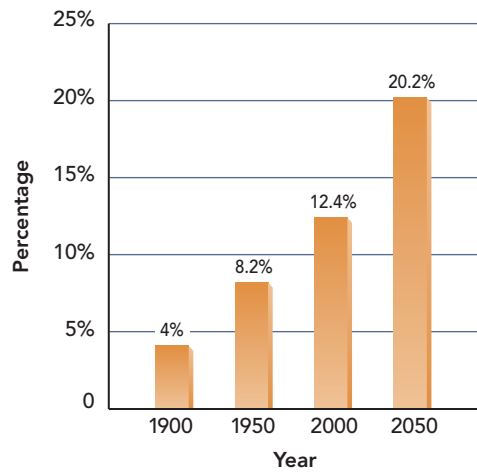
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 9, and earlier years.

FIGURE 10.13   The Median Age of the U.S. Population

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2000:Table 14; 2013:Table 9, and earlier years.

FIGURE 10.14   Life Expectancy in Global Perspective

The World's Longest Life Expectancy (78 and higher)

Country	Years
Japan	83.6 years
Australia	81.8 years
Italy	81.8 years
Canada	81.4 years
France	81.2 years
Spain	81.2 years
Holland	80.8 years
Great Britain	80.1 years
Germany	80.1 years
South Korea	79.1 years
United States	78.4 years

The World's Shortest Life Expectancy (below 55)

Country	Years
Afghanistan	49.3 years
South Africa	49.3 years
Nigeria	51.6 years
Malawi	51.7 years
Mozambique	51.8 years
Zambia	52.4 years
Mali	52.6 years
Tanzania	52.9 years
Uganda	53.2 years
Niger	53.4 years
Burkina Faso	53.7 years
Angola	54.1 years
Cameroon	54.4 years

Note: The countries listed in the source with a life expectancy longer than the United States and those with a life expectancy less than 55 years. All the countries in the top group are industrialized, and none of those in the bottom group are.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 1355.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

At first, the audience sat quietly as the developers explained their plans to build a high-rise apartment building. After a while, people began to shift uncomfortably in their seats. Then they began to show open hostility.

"That's too much money to spend on those people," said one.

"You even want them to have a swimming pool?" asked another incredulously.

Finally, one young woman put their attitudes in a nutshell when she asked, "Who wants all those old people around?"

When physician Robert Butler (1975, 1980) heard these complaints about plans to build apartments for senior citizens, he began to realize how deeply antagonistic feelings toward the elderly can run. He coined the term **ageism** to refer to prejudice and discrimination directed against people because of their age. Let's see how ageism developed in U.S. society.
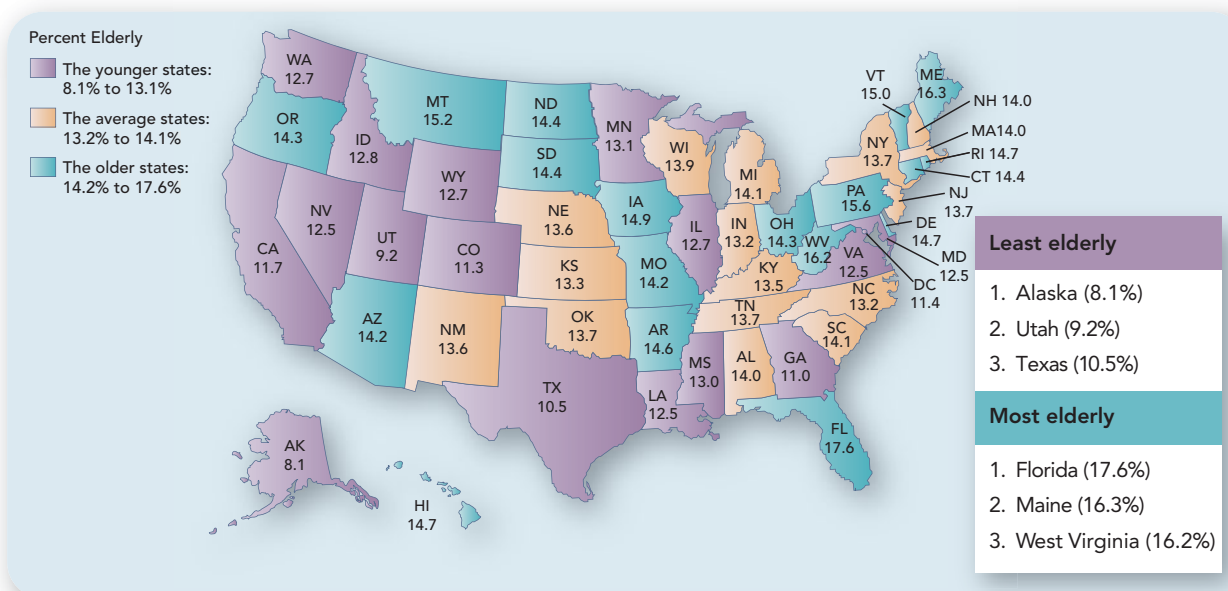
Shifting Meanings of Growing Old

As we have seen, there is nothing inherent in old age to produce any particular attitude, negative or not. Some historians point out that in early U.S. society, old age was regarded positively (Cottin

When does old age begin? And what activities are appropriate for the elderly? From this photo that I took of Munimah, a 65-year-old bonded laborer in Chennai, India, you can see how culturally relative these questions are. No one in Chennai thinks it is extraordinary that this woman makes her living by carrying heavy rocks all day in the burning, tropical sun. Working next to her in the quarry is her 18-year-old son, who breaks the rocks into the size that his mother carries.

FIGURE 10.15   As Florida Goes, So Goes the Nation

Percent Elderly

- The younger states: 8.1% to 13.1%
- The average states: 13.2% to 14.1%
- The older states: 14.2% to 17.6%

WA 12.7
OR 14.3
ID 12.8
MT 15.2
ND 14.4
MN 13.1
WI 13.9
VT 15.0
ME 16.3
NH 14.0
MA 14.0
RI 14.7
CT 14.4
NY 13.7
NV 12.5
UT 9.2
WY 12.7
SD 14.4
IA 14.9
IL 12.7
IN 13.2
OH 14.3
MI 14.1
PA 15.6
NJ 13.7
DE 14.7
MD 12.5
CA 11.7
CO 11.3
NE 13.6
KS 13.3
MO 14.2
KY 13.5
WV 16.2
VA 12.5
DC 11.4
NC 13.2
AZ 14.2
NM 13.6
OK 13.7
AR 14.6
TN 13.7
SC 14.1
TX 10.5
LA 12.5
MS 13.0
AL 14.0
GA 11.0
FL 17.6
AK 8.1
HI 14.7

Least elderly

1. Alaska (8.1%)
2. Utah (9.2%)
3. Texas (10.5%)

Most elderly

1. Florida (17.6%)
2. Maine (16.3%)
3. West Virginia (16.2%)

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 2013:Table 16.

ageism prejudice and discrimination directed against people because of their age; can be directed against any age group, including youth

1979; Fleming et al. 2003). In colonial times, growing old was seen as an accomplishment because so few people made it to old age. With no pensions, the elderly continued to work. Their jobs changed little over time, and they were viewed as storehouses of knowledge about work skills and sources of wisdom about how to live a long life.

The coming of industrialization eroded these bases of respect. With better sanitation and medical care, more people reached old age, and being elderly lost its uniqueness and the honor it had brought. Industrialization's new forms of mass production also made young workers as productive as the elderly. Coupled with mass education, this stripped away the elderly's superior knowledge (Cowgill 1974; Lee 2009).

A basic principle of symbolic interactionism is that we perceive both ourselves and others according to the symbols of our culture. When the meaning of old age changed from an asset to a liability, not only did younger people come to view the elderly differently but the elderly also began to perceive themselves in a new light. This shift in meaning is demonstrated in the way people lie about their age: They used to say that they were older than they were but now claim to be younger than their true ages (Clair et al. 1993).

Today, the meaning of old age is shifting once again—this time in a positive direction. More positive images of the elderly are developing, largely because most of today's U.S. elderly enjoy good health and can take care of themselves financially. If this symbolic shift continues, the next step—now in process—will be to view old age not as a period that precedes death but, rather, as a new stage of growth.

Even theories of old age have taken a more positive tone. A theory that goes by the mouthful *gerotranscendence* was developed by Swedish sociologist Lars Tornstam. The thrust of this theory is that as people grow old, they transcend their limited views of life. They become less self-centered and begin to feel more at one with the universe. Coming to see things as less black and white, they develop subtler ways of viewing right and wrong and tolerate more ambiguity (Manheimer 2005; Hyse and Tornstam 2009). However, this theory seems to miss the mark. Some elderly people do grow softer and more spiritual, but I have seen others turn bitter, close up, and become even more judgmental of others. The theory's limitations should become apparent shortly.

The Influence of the Mass Media

In Chapter 3 (pages 81–83), we noted that the mass media help to shape our ideas about both gender and relationships between men and women. As a powerful source of symbols, the media also influence our ideas of the elderly, the topic of the Mass Media box on the next page.

In Sum: Symbolic interactionists stress that old age has no inherent meaning. There is nothing about old age to automatically summon forth responses of honor and respect, as
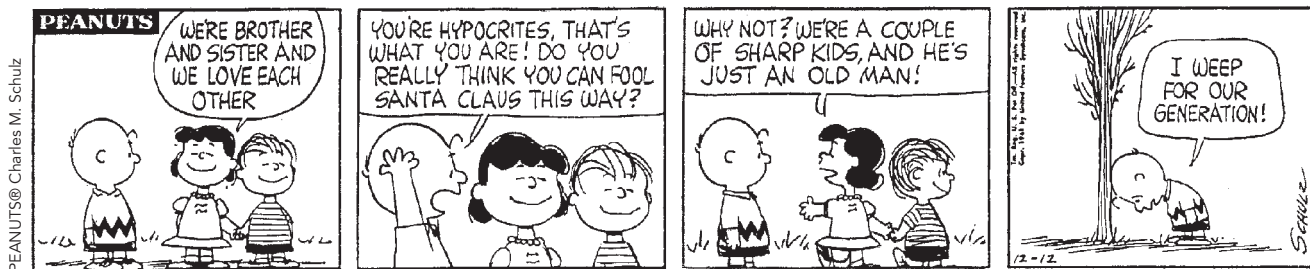
Stereotypes, which play such a profound role in social life, are a basic area of sociological investigation. In contemporary society, the mass media are a major source of stereotypes.

Mass Media in Social Life

The Cultural Lens: Shaping Our Perceptions of the Elderly

The mass media profoundly influence our perception of people (Levy et al. 2013). What we hear and see on television and in the movies, the songs we listen to, the books and magazines we read—all become part of the cultural lens through which we view the world. The media shape our images of minorities and dominant groups; men, women, and children; people with disabilities; those from other cultures—and the elderly.

The shaping of our images and perception of the elderly is subtle, so much so that it usually occurs without our awareness. The elderly, for example, are underrepresented on television and in most popular magazines. This leaves a covert message—that the elderly are of little consequence and can be safely ignored.

The media also reflect and reinforce stereotypes of *gender age*. Older male news anchors are likely to be retained, while female anchors who turn the same age are more likely to be transferred to less visible positions. Similarly, in movies, older men are more likely to play romantic leads—and to play them opposite much younger rising stars.

The message might be subtle, but it is not lost. The more television that people watch, the more they perceive the elderly in negative terms. The elderly,

Aging is more than biology. In some cultures, Jennifer Lopez, 43, would be considered elderly. Lopez is shown here with her boyfriend, Casper Smart, 25.

too, internalize these negative images, which, in turn, influences the ways they view themselves. These images are so powerful that they affect the elderly's health, even the way they walk (Donlon et al. 2005).

We become fearful of growing old, and we go to great lengths to deny that we are losing our youth. Fear and denial play into the hands of advertisers, of course, who exploit our concerns. They help us deny this biological reality by selling us hair dyes, skin creams, and other products that are designed to conceal even the appearance of old age. For these same reasons, plastic surgeons do a thriving business as they remove telltale signs of aging.

The elderly's growing number and affluence translate into economic clout and political power. It is inevitable, then, that the media's images of the elderly will change. An indication of that change is shown in the photo at the left.

For Your Consideration

➤ What other examples of fear and denial of growing old are you familiar with? What examples of older men playing romantic leads with younger women can you give? Of older women and younger men? Why do you think we have gender age stereotypes?

with the Abkhasians, or any other response. Culture shapes how we perceive the elderly, including the ways we view our own aging. In short, the social modifies the biological.

The Functionalist Perspective

Functionalists analyze how the parts of society work together. Among the components of society are **age cohorts**—people who were born at roughly the same time and who pass through the life course together. This term might strike you as something divorced from your life, but age cohorts actually affect your life deeply. For example, when you finish college, if the age cohort that is retiring is large (a "baby boom" generation), jobs will be plentiful. In contrast, if the age cohort is small (a "baby bust" generation), your opportunities for the kind of job you really want will shrink.

Let's consider people who are about to retire or who have retired recently. We will review theories that focus on how people adjust to retirement.

10.9 Summarize theories of disengagement, activity, and continuity.

age cohort people born at roughly the same time who pass through the life course together

Disengagement Theory

Think about how disruptive it would be if the elderly left their jobs only when they died or became incompetent. How does society get the elderly to leave their positions so younger people can take them? According to **disengagement theory**, developed by Elaine Cumming and William Henry (1961), this is the function of pensions. Pensions get the elderly to *disengage* from their positions and hand them over to younger people. Retirement, then, is a mutually beneficial arrangement between two parts of society.

Evaluation of the Theory.   Certainly pensions do entice the elderly to leave their jobs so a younger generation can step in. I think we all know this, so it isn't much of a theory. Critics have also pointed out that the elderly don't really "disengage." People who quit their jobs don't sit in rocking chairs and watch the world go by. Instead of disengaging, the retired *exchange* one set of roles for another (Tadic et al. 2012). They find these new ways of conducting their lives, which often center on friendship, no less satisfying than their earlier roles. In addition, the meaning of retirement has changed since this "theory" was developed. Less and less does retirement mean an end to work. Many people stay at their jobs, but they slow down, putting in fewer hours. Others remain as part-time consultants. Some use the Internet to explore new areas of work. Some switch careers, even in their 60s, some even in their 70s. If disengagement theory is ever resurrected, it must come to grips with our new patterns of retirement.

Activity Theory

Are retired people more satisfied with life? (All that extra free time and not having to kowtow to a boss must be nice.) Are intimate activities more satisfying than formal ones? Such questions are the focus of **activity theory**. Although we could consider this theory from other perspectives, we are examining it from the functionalist perspective because its focus is how disengagement is functional or dysfunctional.

Evaluation of the Theory.   When it comes to retired people, it is the same as with young people: No one size fits all. Some people are happier when they are more active, but others prefer less involvement (Keith 1982; Levy et al. 2013). Similarly, many people find informal, intimate activities, such as spending time with friends, to be more satisfying than formal activities. But not everyone does. In one study, 2,000 retired U.S. men reported formal activities to be just as satisfying as informal ones. Even solitary tasks, such as doing home repairs, had about the same impact as intimate activities on these men's life satisfaction (Beck and Page 1988). It is the same for spending time with adult children. "Often enough" for some parents is "not enough" or even "too much" for others. In short, researchers have discovered the obvious: What makes life satisfying for one person doesn't work for another. (This, of course, can be a source of intense frustration for retired couples.)

disengagement theory the view that society is stabilized by having the elderly retire (disengage from) their positions of responsibility so the younger generation can step into their shoes

Among the more obvious factors that influence health in old age are exercise and diet. Less obvious is a sense of belonging, which also adds years to life.

Continuity Theory

Another theory of aging called **continuity theory** focuses, as its name implies, on how the elderly continue ties with their past (Wang and Shultz 2010). When they retire, many people take on new roles that are similar to the ones they give up. For example, a former CEO might serve as a consultant, a retired electrician might do small electrical repairs, or a pensioned banker might take over the finances of her church. Researchers have found that people who are active in multiple roles (wife, author, mother, intimate friend, church member, etc.) are better equipped to handle the changes that come with growing old. Social class is also significant: With their greater resources, people from higher social classes adjust better to the challenges of aging.

Evaluation of the Theory.   The basic criticism of continuity theory is that it is too broad (Hatch 2000). We all have anchor points based on our particular

experiences in life, and we all rely on them to make adjustments to what we confront in life. This applies to people of all ages beyond infancy. This theory is really a collection of loosely connected ideas, with no specific application to the elderly.

In Sum: The *broader* perspective of the functionalists is how society's parts work together to keep society running smoothly. If younger workers had to fight to take over the jobs of the elderly, it would be disruptive to society. To make this a smooth transition, the elderly are offered pensions, which entice them to leave their positions. Functionalists also use a *narrower* perspective, focusing on how individuals adjust to their retirement. The findings of this narrower perspective are too mixed to be of much value—except that people who have better resources and are active in multiple roles adjust better to old age (Thomas 2012).

Because U.S. workers do not have to retire by any certain age, it is also important to study how people decide to keep working or to retire in the first place. After they retire, how do they reconstruct their identities and come to terms with their changed lives? As the United States grows even grayer, this should prove a productive area of sociological theory and research.

The Conflict Perspective

As you know, the conflict perspective's guiding principle is how social groups compete with one another to control power and resources. How does this apply to society's age groups? Regardless of whether the young and old recognize it, say conflict theorists, they are opponents in a struggle that threatens to throw society into turmoil. Let's look at how the passage of Social Security legislation fits the conflict view.

In old age, as in all other stages of the life course, people find life more pleasant if they have friends and enough money to meet their needs. How do you think the elderly man to the left finds life? How about the elderly men in the photo to the right? While neither welcomes old age, you can see what a difference social factors make in how people experience this time of life.

Fighting for Resources: Social Security Legislation

In the 1920s, before Social Security provided an income for the aged, two-thirds of all citizens over 65 had no savings and could not support themselves (Holtzman 1963; Crossen 2004). Then came the Great Depression, and things got worse. Out of desperation, in 1930 Francis Townsend, a physician, started a movement to rally older citizens. He soon had one-third of all Americans over age 65 enrolled in his Townsend Clubs. They demanded that the federal government impose a national sales tax of 2 percent to provide $200 a month for every person over 65 ($2,100 a month in today's money). In 1934, the Townsend Plan went before Congress. Because it called for such high payments and many were afraid that it would destroy people's incentive to save for the future, members of Congress looked for a way to reject the plan without appearing to oppose the elderly. When President Roosevelt announced his own, more modest Social Security plan in 1934, Congress embraced it (Schottland 1963; Amenta 2006).

To provide jobs for younger people, the new Social Security law required that workers retire at age 65. It did not matter how well people did their work, or how much they needed the pay. For decades, the elderly protested. Finally, in 1986, Congress eliminated mandatory retirement. Today, almost 90 percent of Americans retire by age 65, but most do so voluntarily. No longer can they be forced out of their jobs simply because of age.

Intergenerational Competition and Conflict

Social Security came about not because the members of Congress had generous hearts but out of a struggle between competing interest groups. As conflict theorists stress, equilibrium between competing groups is only a temporary balancing of oppositional forces, one that can be upset at any time. Following this principle, could conflict between the elderly and the young be in our future? Let's consider this possibility.

If you listen closely, you can hear ripples of grumbling—complaints that the elderly are getting more than their fair share of society's resources. The huge costs of Social Security and Medicare are a special concern. As incredible as it may seem, *one of every two* tax dollars (52 percent) is spent on these two programs (*Statistical Abstract* 2013:Tables 481, 488). As Figure 10.16 shows, Social Security payments were $781 million in 1950; now they run *1,000 times* higher. Look at Figure 10.17 on the next page, which shows the nation's huge—and growing—medical bill to care for the elderly. Like gasoline poured on a fire, these soaring costs may well fuel an intergenerational showdown.

Figure 10.18 on the next page shows another area of concern that can provoke an intergenerational conflict. You can see how greatly the poverty rate of the elderly dropped as the government transferred resources to them. It is now just a *third* of what it used to be. Now compare the path of the children's poverty. You can see that it is *higher* now than it was in 1967—and in all the years in between. Our economic crisis has taken a severe toll on the nation's children.

Did the sharp decline in the elderly's rate of poverty come at the expense of the nation's children? Of course not. Congress could have decided to finance the welfare of children just as it did that of the elderly. It chose not to. Why? Following conflict theorists, the reason is that

FIGURE 10.16   **Social Security Payments to Beneficiaries**
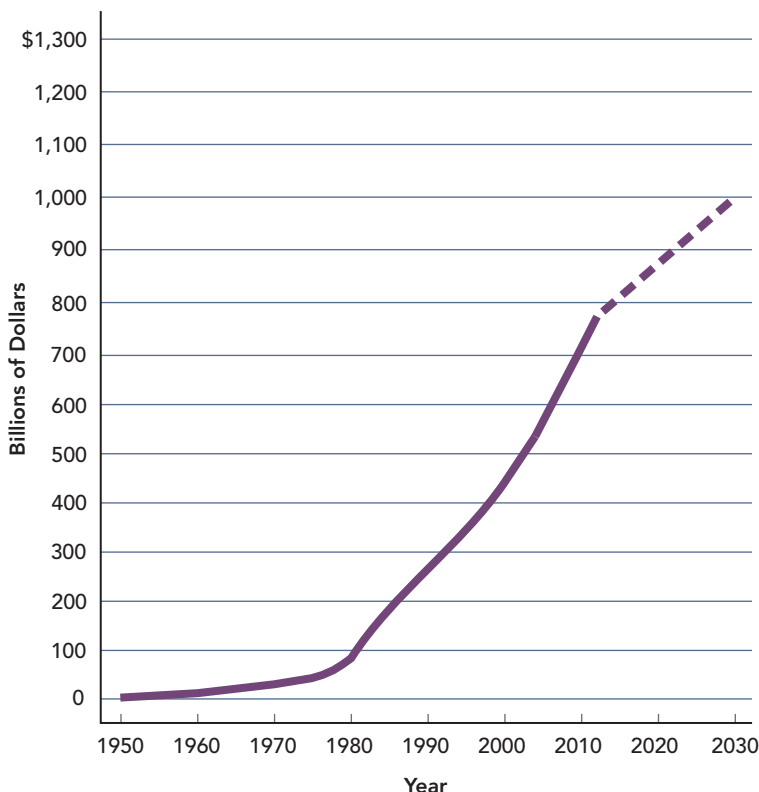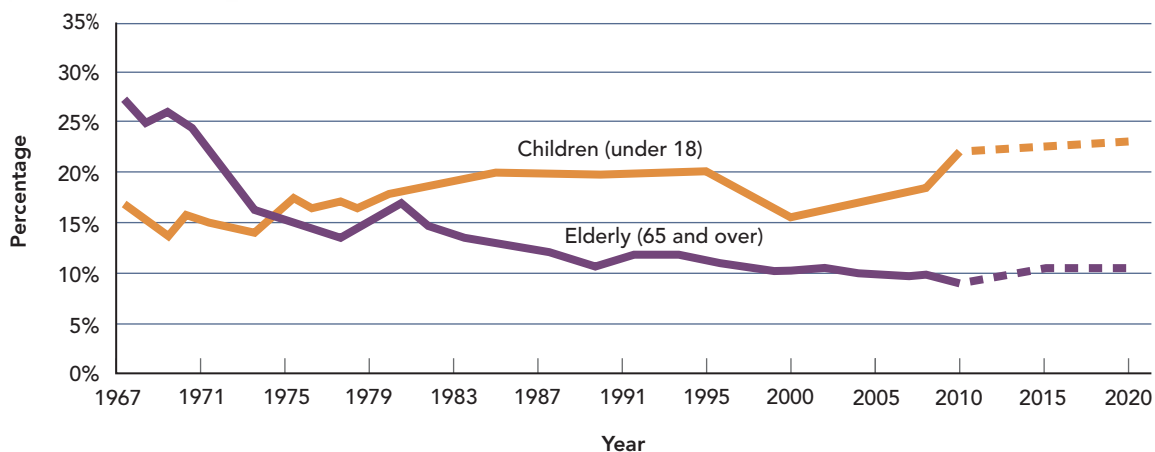
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* 1997: Table 518; 2013:Table 481. Broken line indicates the author's projections.

FIGURE 10.17   Health Care Costs for the Elderly and Disabled
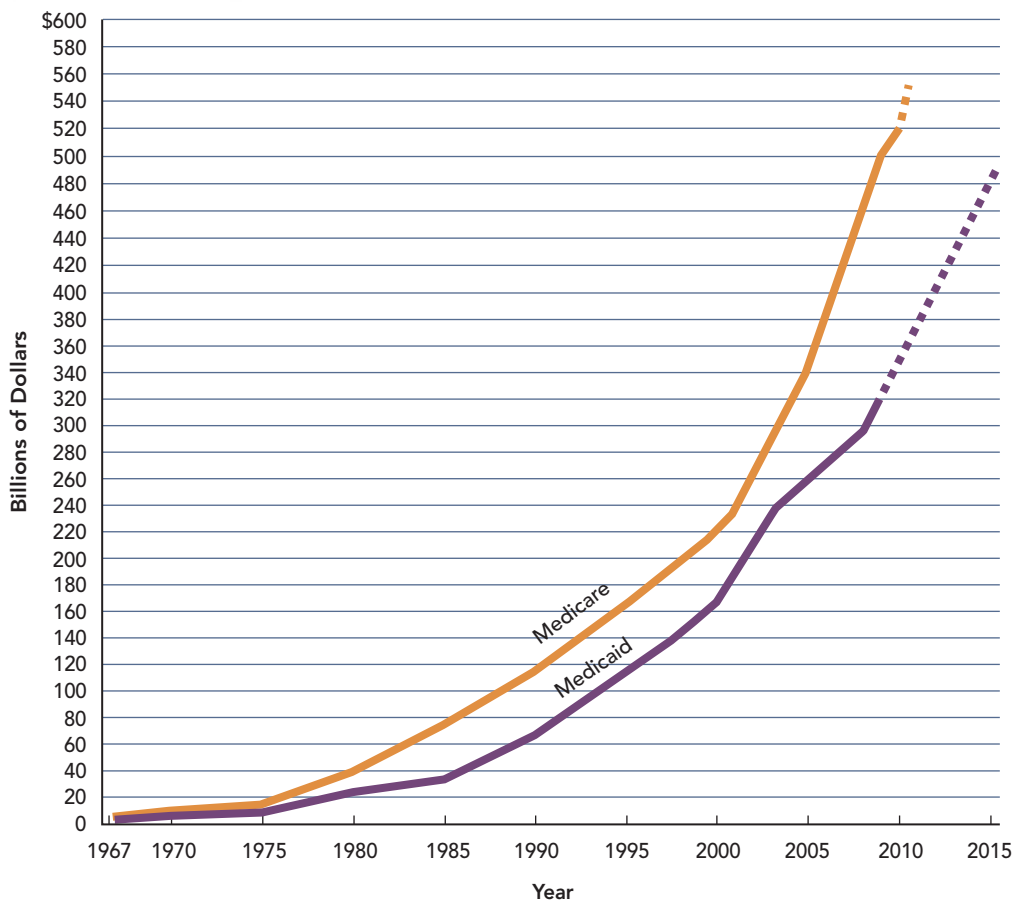
Note: Medicare is intended for the elderly and disabled, Medicaid for the poor. About 72 percent of Medicare ($373 billion) and 20 percent of Medicaid payments ($61 billion) go for medical care for the elderly (*Statistical Abstract* 2013:Tables 147, 154).

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States* various years, and 2013:Tables 147, 154. Broken lines indicate the author's projections.

FIGURE 10.18   Age and Trends in Poverty

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract of the United States,* various years, and 2013:Table 725. Broken lines indicate the author's projections.

the elderly, not the children, launched a broad assault on Congress. The lobbyists for the elderly put a lot of grease in the politicians' reelection machine. The children didn't offer them a payoff , a silence that has cost them dearly..

Figure 10.18 could indicate another reason for a coming intergenerational conflict. If we take a 9 percent poverty rate as a goal for the nation's children—to match what the government has accomplished for the elderly—where would the money come from? If the issue gets pitched as a case of taking money from the elderly to give to the children, it can divide the generations. To get people to think that they must choose between pathetic children and suffering old folks can splinter voters into opposing groups. Would improving the welfare of children ever be presented in such a crass way? Ask yourself this: Do politicians ever try to manipulate our emotions to get elected?

A Jump to the Future?   A few politicians, but a rare few, say what they really feel. Taro Aso, the finance minister of Japan, said that the elderly are "tax burdens who should hurry up and die" (Bennett-Smith 2013). On the Social Map on page 318, you saw that 23 percent of Japan's population is elderly. Evidently, the intergenerational conflict has begun there.

In Sum: People of different age groups (cohorts) are among society's many groups that are competing for scarce resources. As more demands are placed on these resources, the opposing interests of these groups will become more apparent.

10.11 Discuss developing views of aging and the impact of technology on how long people live.

Looking Toward the Future

Let's not lose sight of one of the major changes stressed in this chapter—that for the first time in human history huge numbers of people are becoming elderly. It is inevitable that such a fundamental change will have a powerful impact on societies around the world, so much so that it might even transform them. We don't have space to explore such potential transformations, which are only speculative at the moment, so let's try to catch a glimpse of a new approach to aging.

As their numbers grow and their resources and health improve, the elderly will enjoy life more and break the stereotypes that surround them.

New Views of Aging

As huge numbers of Americans move into old age, the elderly have begun not only to challenge the demeaning stereotypes of the aged but also to develop new perspectives of aging. These new approaches build on the idea that old age should not be viewed as "a-time-close-to-death," but, rather, as a new period of life, one with its specific challenges, to be sure, but also one to be enjoyed, even celebrated. This new time of life provides unique opportunities to pursue interests, to develop creativity, and to enhance the appreciation of life's beauty and one's place in it.

This approach to aging is new, so we don't know the directions it will take. But if this emphasis continues, it will change how the younger generations view the elderly—as well as how the elderly view themselves. Negative stereotypes of weak old people living out their last years while they get ready to die might even be replaced with stereotypes of robust, engaged, thriving older adults (Manheimer 2005). No stereotype will encompass the reality of the elderly, of course, as the aged differ among themselves as much as younger people do.

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CHAPTER 10 Summary and Review

Issues of Sex and Gender

10.1 Distinguish between sex and gender; use research on Vietnam veterans and testosterone to explain why the door to biology is opening in sociology.

What is gender stratification?

The term **gender stratification** refers to unequal access to property, power, and prestige on the basis of sex. Each society establishes a structure that, on the basis of sex and gender, opens and closes doors to its privileges. P. 291.

How do sex and gender differ?

Sex refers to biological distinctions between males and females. It consists of both primary and secondary sex characteristics. **Gender,** in contrast, is what a society considers proper behaviors and attitudes for its male and female members. *Sex* physically distinguishes males from females; *gender* refers to what people call "masculine" and "feminine." P. 291.

Why do the behaviors of males and females differ?

The "nature versus nurture" debate refers to whether differences in the behaviors of males and females are caused by inherited (biological) or learned (cultural) characteristics. Almost all sociologists take the side of nurture. In recent years, however, sociologists have begun to cautiously open the door to biology. Pp. 291–296.

Gender Inequality in Global Perspective

10.2 Discuss the origin of gender discrimination and review global aspects of violence against women.

How did females become a minority group?

Patriarchy, or male dominance, appears to be universal. The origin of discrimination against females is lost in history, but the primary theory of how females became a minority group in their own societies focuses on the physical limitations imposed by childbirth. Pp. 297–300.

What are some forms of global violence against females?

The major forms discussed are honor killing and female circumcision. Pp. 300–301.

Gender Inequality in the United States

10.3 Review the rise of feminism and summarize gender inequality in health care and education.

Is the feminist movement new?

In what is called the "first wave," feminists made political demands for change in the early 1900s—and were met with hostility, and even violence. The "second wave" began in the 1960s and continues today. A "third wave" has emerged. Pp. 302–304

What forms do gender inequality in health care and education take?

Physicians don't take women's health complaints as seriously as those of men, and they exploit women's fears, performing unnecessary hysterectomies. More women than men attend college. Some majors are categorized as "feminine" or "masculine." Pp. 304–308.

How does gender inequality show up in the workplace?

10.4 Explain reasons for the pay gap; discuss the glass ceiling and sexual harassment.

All occupations show a gender gap in pay. For college graduates, the lifetime pay gap runs over a million dollars in favor of men. Women often confront a **glass ceiling. Sexual harassment** also continues to be a reality of the workplace. Pp. 308–313.

What is the relationship between gender and violence?

10.5 Summarize violence against women: rape, murder, and violence in the home.

Overwhelmingly, the victims of rape, murder, and spouse abuse are females. Conflict theorists point out that men use violence to maintain their power and privilege. Pp. 313–315.

What is the trend in gender inequality in politics?

10.6 ▶ Discuss changes in gender and politics.

Women continue to be underrepresented in politics, but the trend toward greater political equality is firmly in place. Pp. 315–316.

Aging in Global Perspective

10.7 ▶ Understand how attitudes toward the elderly vary around the world; explain how industrialization led to a graying globe.

How are the elderly treated around the world, and why are there more elderly?

There is no single set of attitudes, beliefs, or policies regarding the aged. Rather, they vary around the world, ranging from exclusion and killing to integration and honor. Industrialization, bringing more resources, has created a global trend for more people to live longer. Pp. 316–321.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

10.8 ▶ Discuss changes in perceptions of the elderly.

What does the social construction of aging mean?

Nothing in the nature of aging produces any particular set of attitudes. Rather, attitudes toward the elderly are rooted in society and differ from one social group to another. Pp. 322–323.

The Functionalist Perspective

10.9 ▶ Summarize theories of disengagement, activity, and continuity.

How is retirement functional for society?

Functionalists focus on how the withdrawal of the elderly from positions of responsibility benefits society.

Disengagement theory examines retirement as a device for ensuring that a society's positions of responsibility will be passed smoothly from one generation to the next. **Activity theory** examines how people adjust when they retire. **Continuity theory** focuses on how people adjust to growing old by maintaining their roles and coping techniques. Pp. 323–325.

The Conflict Perspective

10.10 ▶ Explain the conflict perspective on Social Security and discuss intergenerational competition and conflict.

Is there conflict among different age groups?

Social Security legislation is an example of one generation making demands on another generation for limited resources. As the number of retired people grows, there are relatively fewer workers to support them. Health care cost of the aged are soaring. The child poverty rate is more than double that of the elderly. Pp. 325–328.

Looking Toward the Future

10.11 ▶ Discuss developing views of aging and the impact of technology on how long people live.

What trends indicate the future for gender and aging?

The trends are positive: Increasing equality and political participation for women and, for the elderly, longer lives, less poverty, and the development of creative aging. P. 328.

Thinking Critically about Chapter 10

1. What is your position on the "nature versus nurture" (biology or culture) debate? What materials in this chapter support your position?

2. Why do you think that the gender gap in pay exists all over the world?

3. How does culture influence our ideas about the elderly?

4. How do you think we can reduce the poverty rate of children?