

THINKING ABOUT WOMEN

Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender

ELEVENTH EDITION

MARGARET L. ANDERSEN



Thinking about Women

Sociological Perspectives
on Sex and Gender

Eleventh Edition

Margaret L. Andersen

University of Delaware

Portfolio Manager: Manjula Anaskar
Content Producer: Sugandh Juneja
Portfolio Manager Assistant: Anna Austin
Product Marketer: Marianela Silvestri
Art/Designer: Pearson CSC
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Dedication

For Aubrey Emma Hanerfeld (2012–) and Aden Jonathan Carcopo (2015–)

*With hopes that you will grow up in a world where women, along with all men,
are treated with fairness, justice, and full human rights*

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Preface

This has been an exciting time to write a new edition of *Thinking about Women*. Since the book was first published in 1983, there have been massive changes in the status of women in society. However, other than the early days of the second wave of feminism, it is hard to recall a more tumultuous time for women than now. The defeat of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election, the #MeToo movement, the confirmation hearings for now Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, and the rise of more women in elected office: These and other widely publicized events that have brought renewed attention to women's lives—their triumphs and their struggles. And, yet, even with this clamor in the media, most women spend their days juggling their basic needs: work, family and personal life, health care, and the other realities of daily life. This makes thinking about women all the more interesting. With each new edition of *Thinking about Women*, I get the chance to reflect on women's lives—how they have evolved, how they vary among different groups, and what challenges remain. Now, as much as ever, we need clear-headed assessments of women's (and men's) experiences in society. That is the purpose of this book.

Especially for the most likely readers—women and men enrolled in college—even with the public drama surrounding women's issues, the full reality of women's lives may not be evident. Younger women have come to expect fair treatment, and they may be shocked by some of the overt sexism that has rocked society in recent years. I don't think I could have ever imagined not that many years ago that we would elect a president who openly bragged about being able to grab women's genitals because he was so powerful. Nor could I have even imagined that, having heard such things, women would continue to support such a leader—White women, at least. When I think about this, I am constantly reminded that women are not a monolithic category and that attention to diversity among women is just as important as thinking about women per se. Yes, many things have changed. It was not that long ago when women could not hold jobs as teachers if they were pregnant; when women were excluded from some of the most prestigious colleges in the country; when women could not have their own credit cards; when single women were barred from legal access to birth control. Times have changed indeed. Yet, rates of violence against women remain frighteningly high. Despite a half century of laws providing equal pay for equal work, the wage gap between women and men persists. And, even with more women getting elected to positions of political leadership, a huge gender gap remains in the representation

of women in positions of power in political, economic, and educational institutions.

How do we explain these truths? Some of the answers will be found in the chapters of this book. Like the earlier editions of *Thinking about Women*, the eleventh edition introduces readers to how gender operates in society. Studying how gender inequalities are found in women's lives will unveil how gender shapes men's lives, too. The presence of gender in society is ubiquitous—seen virtually everywhere, including the influence on women's and men's self-concepts as well as their relationships, attitudes, beliefs and values, life opportunities, and other social behaviors. The long life of *Thinking about Women* (first published in 1983) indicates the strong interest in this subject, as well as the vitality of feminist scholarship over this period of time. It is an honor—and, frankly, a lot of fun—to continue revising this book to reflect the new ideas and new discoveries that emerge from research and theory about gender and women's lives.

Each new edition of *Thinking about Women* provides an opportunity to think about how new generations of students might be thinking about gender. Most students in my classes have come of age at a time when it appears to them that women have it made, that barriers to women's achievements are a thing of the past—a past about which they actually know very little. This provides an opportunity not only to try to connect to different generations but also to observe and analyze the changes that have taken place—and those that have not—in both women's and men's lives.

For young students reading this book, feminism may seem a thing of the past. The new visibility of women in prominent positions in society, the opening of new fields of work and study to women, changes in women's and men's roles in the family, and, in general, more liberal attitudes among much of the public on matters related to gender make it seem that feminism is no longer needed. Indeed, much progress has been made in transforming women's lives. However, as you will learn in this book, women and men continue to be unequal in many ways, and despite the progress that has been made, gender and the differences it makes still permeate women's and men's lives.

In this book, you will see how gender is socially constructed—that is, formed through early learning patterns that are continuously reinforced throughout all social institutions. You will also see how gender intersects with other social factors, especially race and class, but also sexual orientation, age, religion, and nationality, among others. A large part of the book focuses on gender in major social

institutions, including the economy and work, families, health care, religion, criminal justice, education, and government. The book also reviews the development of feminist thought and its relationship to the women's movement over time.

Although the title of the book suggests that the text is only about women, that is not the case. Gender influences everyone in society. The new scholarship on gender first emerged from taking women's lives seriously. Thus, much, but not all, of the focus of *Thinking about Women* is on women, but not to the exclusion of men. Men's lives are influenced by gender, too, but in different ways than women's lives. How gender organizes relations between and among women and men is an important part of this book.

Furthermore, understanding gender means not treating women as a single category—as if all women's experiences are the same. Gender is also entangled with systems of race, class, and sexual inequality. From the early years when the feminist movement was largely centered on the lives and experiences of White women, feminist scholars now anchor their work in recognizing the interrelationship among gender, race, class, and sexuality.

Thinking about Women develops from the empirical research and feminist theory that has taught us how much gender matters in society. It presents the most current scholarship on gender, but in a style that is accessible to those who have never thought much about it before, as well as to those who have been introduced to studying women in other undergraduate courses or life activities. *Thinking about Women* is grounded in a sociological perspective, although it can be used in interdisciplinary courses.

Organization of the Book

Thinking about Women is organized in four parts. Part I, **Introduction**, acquaints students to the study of gender as it is rooted in feminist analysis. It presents the sociological framework that underlies this book and shows how research on women and women's studies has developed from the feminist movement. Part I also includes discussion of men's studies and its connection to feminist scholarship.

Part II, **Gender, Culture, and Sex**, focuses on the social construction of gender and the representation of gender in culture, particularly in the media. Chapter 2, "The Social Construction of Gender," reviews the influence of gender socialization and the role of gender in shaping women's and men's identities. Chapter 3, "Gender, Culture, and the Media," analyzes the increasing significance of the media and popular culture on the social construction of gender. Chapter 4, "Sexuality and Intimate Relationships," examines the relationship between gender and sexuality as social

constructions. This chapter shows how gender and sexuality reinforce each other.

Part III, **Gender and Social Institutions**, examines the institutional structures of work, family, health, religion, criminal justice, education, and politics. Chapter 5, "Gender, Work, and the Economy," details research on women's work and economic status. The chapter includes a discussion of poverty and welfare, as well as the ongoing struggle of balancing work and family—a theme also picked up in Chapter 6. Chapter 6, "Gender and Families," focuses on the historic evolution of contemporary family forms and emphasizes the diversity of women's experiences in families. It also includes discussion of various problems for families, including family violence, teen pregnancy, and child care. Chapter 7, "Women, Health, and Reproduction," looks at the consequences of gender inequality for women's health compared to men's and also includes an extensive discussion of reproductive politics. Chapter 8, "Women and Religion," conceptualizes religion as both a source of women's oppression and, ironically, a source of women's liberation. Chapter 9, "Women, Crime, and Violence," studies crime and women—both as victims and perpetrators. It also examines women's victimization by violence and discusses how men's violence is related to gender roles. Chapter 10, "Gender, Education, and Science," not only looks at schooling, but it also shows how the construction of scientific knowledge is influenced by the exclusion of women from positions of scientific leadership. Chapter 11, "Women, Power, and Politics," provides a transition to the last part of the book on social change and looks at the engagement of women in political institutions. This chapter also includes an overview of the women's movement and other forms of women's political activism.

The final part of the book, Part IV, **Gender and Social Change: Frameworks of Feminism**, introduces students to feminist theory and its link to the women's movement historically and today. Chapter 12, "Liberal Feminism and Social Reform," reviews the evolution of liberal feminism, showing students how the term *liberal*—though widely stigmatized in popular discourse—is a specific feminist philosophy with important implications for social change. By detailing the historical evolution of liberal feminism, students can examine their own assumptions about the dominant strategy of "equal rights" that has characterized much feminist transformation of society. Chapter 13, "Contemporary Frameworks in Feminist Theory," reviews more radical perspectives and updates the discussion of theory to include multiracial feminism, postmodernism, and queer theory. Throughout, the presentation of theory emphasizes the need to examine one's underlying assumptions—theoretical or common sense—and to understand the different strategies needed to improve women's lives.

New to the Eleventh Edition

Each new edition of *Thinking about Women* benefits greatly from the comments of faculty and students who have read earlier versions of the book. Their comments and reviews enrich each new edition and I thank them for their suggestions.

This edition maintains the features from the tenth edition, including: **a box in every chapter: *History Speaks: Yesterday's Feminists Talk about Today***. This feature provides a brief biographical sketch of a historic feminist and briefly discusses some of her key ideas. The point is to introduce today's students to some of the classic feminist thinkers whom they might not otherwise know, and also to show the relevance of their work when thinking about today's world. Thus, the questions in these *History Speaks* boxes will invite students to reflect on what this person might think about a contemporary issue that stems from the chapter content. For example, students are introduced to Margaret Sanger in Chapter 7 on women and reproduction and are then asked to think about what she might be saying about a topic such as abstinence-only sex education. Or, in Chapter 4, students are introduced to Audre Lorde and asked to reflect on what she would be saying today about LGBTQ rights. This feature not only provides some introduction to historic feminists but also includes a critical thinking exercise that encourages students to relate historic feminist ideas to contemporary social issues.

The *Thinking Further* feature, appearing in some boxes and/or graphs, asks students a critical-thinking question that helps them interpret what they see in the box or figure and encourages them to ask new questions and think about additional insights that stem from the material presented. This feature appears throughout the text.

As in earlier editions, the eleventh edition has a pleasing visual format with new photos and graphic features throughout that makes the text more visually appealing to today's generation of visual learners. This edition also maintains the box features on media, research, and men that were included in earlier editions, including *Focus on Research*, *Media Matters*, and the retitled *A Closer Look at Men*. Thus, each chapter (except Chapter 1) has boxes on the following themes:

- **History Speaks: Yesterday's Feminists Talk about Today**
Example (Chapter 5): A biographical sketch of Dolores Huerta is included and students are asked to think about how her work on low-wage work especially influences workers in their communities, including immigrant workers.
- **Focus on Research**
Example (Chapter 6): A discussion of how young adults imagine integrating family and work is included.

Students are also asked to think about how their generation and their family background influence their aspirations for work and family.

- **Media Matters**

Example (Chapter 11): This box features research on how women political candidates are portrayed in the media.

- **A Closer Look at Men**

Example (Chapter 4): The theme of this box is about the peer socialization of young boys in which homophobic insults reinforce social norms of masculinity.

Throughout this new edition, current research has been incorporated and examples have been updated to appeal to contemporary students. Also, figures and empirical data reflect the most current information.

This text is available in two formats—digital and print. To learn more about our programs, pricing options, and customization, visit www.pearsonhighered.com.

Pedagogical Features

In addition to the boxed features, students and instructors will find useful pedagogical elements that enable learning and discussion. The *Chapter Summary and Themes* account concludes every chapter. These are intended to highlight the major points of each chapter, thus enhancing student learning.

Each chapter also includes *Discussion Questions/Projects for Thought*. This feature can be used for in-class projects or research assignments and papers.

All *Key Terms* at the end of each chapter are also defined in a glossary at the end of the book. *Chapter outlines* open each chapter so that students will know what key ideas to look for. *Graphics*, developed by the author, are found throughout the book to help students learn to interpret data; these have been updated with the most recent data available.

Chapter-by-Chapter Changes

In addition to the updating and incorporation of new research, here are some of the *highlights* of individual chapters.

Chapter 1: Studying Women: Feminist Perspectives

The introductory chapter has been updated to reflect current events, including the 2016 election and the #MeToo movement, but the basic thrust of the chapter remains the same: introducing students to why the study of women continues to matter.

Chapter 2: The Social Construction of Gender

This chapter has been shortened to maintain student interest. The theory section was reorganized for better clarity and there is new material on Title IX, children's play, and the debate about genes and gender. At the suggestion of reviewers, the section on biological sex differences has been abbreviated. New historical research on how the

colors pink and blue became associated with girls and boys is included. There is also new material in this chapter on gender and video games, as well as gender and sports.

Chapter 3: Gender, Culture, and the Media

The chapter has been updated to reflect the newest research on women's presence and depiction in the media. There is new research as well on women athletes and how they are represented in the media.

Chapter 4: Sexuality and Intimate Relationships

Since the tenth edition, there has been additional new research on sexuality and sexual identities. This chapter has been revised to include the most recent scholarship on these subjects.

Chapter 5: Gender, Work, and the Economy

This chapter has been reorganized to place more emphasis on immigration and gender. There is also new research presented on gender bias and stereotypes in the workplace and new research on sexual harassment. The section on the history of work has been shortened to hold student interest but continue to provide a historical framework. Data has been updated throughout to reflect the most recent information on income, poverty, and labor force participation.

Chapter 6: Gender and Families

Since the last edition of this book, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled same-sex marriage to be constitutional. This chapter reflects that change. There is also updated research on marriage, divorce, and family diversity.

Chapter 7: Women, Health, and Reproduction

This chapter has been substantially reorganized and opens with discussion of the sociology of the body. This will capture student attention from the start. The intersectionality of race, class, and gender is stressed throughout the chapter, as in the rest of the book. The chapter retains a detailed discussion of gender and the Affordable Care Act.

Chapter 8: Women and Religion

This revised chapter includes new scholarship on gender and religion as well as the role of religion in gender ideologies. There is more material on Muslim women than in prior editions.

Chapter 9: Women, Crime, and Violence

This chapter reviews violence against women as a critically important and contemporary issue. It also includes material on women's commission of crime and the status of women in the criminal justice system. Data on crime and crime victimization is updated throughout.

Chapter 10: Gender, Education, and Science

This chapter includes new research on women in science careers and explores the gender gap in education. The section on feminist standpoint theory was also revised to provide a good sequel to the theory section of the book.

Chapter 11: Women, Power, and Politics

This chapter was updated to reflect the election of Donald Trump, including data on voting patterns and the gender gap in politics. The chapter retains information on women in the military, including women as veterans and material on sexual assault in the military.

Chapter 12: Liberal Feminism and Social Reform

Students are introduced to the framework of liberal feminism, as compared to other political philosophies. This includes both historical and contemporary feminist thought.

Chapter 13: Contemporary Frameworks of Feminist Theory

The chapter reviews different approaches in current feminist theory, including a new discussion of different feminist identities.

Instructor Resources

Instructor's Manual and Test Bank (ISBN 9780135284940)

For each chapter in the text, this valuable resource provides Essay Questions, Classroom Activities and Student Assignments, and Suggested Reading. The Instructor's Manual and Test Bank is available to adopters at www.pearsonhighered.com.

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Without the support of my family, I would never have even dreamed that this book would come out in any edition, much less the eleventh! Your support and encouragement means more to me than I can ever express. With much love to

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and I deeply appreciate it! With all of you in mind, I dedicate this edition to my great niece and great nephew, Aubrey Emma Hanerfeld and Aden Jonathan Carcopo. Although it will be a while before they read this book, I hope their lives are filled with joy and the freedom to pursue their dreams!

Margaret L. Andersen

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About the Author



Margaret L. Andersen is the Edward F. and Elizabeth Goodman Rosenberg Professor Emerita at the University of Delaware. She is the author of several books, including *Race in Society: The Enduring American Dilemma*; *On Land and On Sea: Women in the Rosenfeld Collection*; *Living Art: The Life of Paul R. Jones, African American Art*

Collector; and *Sociology: The Essentials* (coauthor, Howard F. Taylor). She has also written three best-selling anthologies: *Race, Class, and Gender* (coedited with Patricia Hill Collins); *Race and Ethnicity in U.S. Society: The Changing Landscape* (coedited with Elizabeth Higginbotham); and *Understanding Society: Readings in Sociology* (coedited with Kim Logio and

Howard F. Taylor). She is the former vice president of the American Sociological Association and past president of the Eastern Sociological Society.

Andersen is a recipient of the Jessie Bernard Award given annually by the American Sociological Association for scholarship expanding the horizons of sociology to include women, as well as the Robin M. Williams Lecture Award and the Merit Award from the Eastern Sociological Society. She also received the 2004 Sociologists for Women (SWS) Feminist Lecturer Award, given annually to someone in the nation whose work benefits women. Andersen serves as a member (and former chair) of the National Advisory Board of Stanford University's Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. She has won two teaching awards from the University of Delaware, which also granted her an honorary degree.

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Chapter 1

Studying Women: Feminist Perspectives



Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Explain why studying women and the feminist movement is important
- 1.2** Relate the sociological perspective to the study of women
- 1.3** Describe the relationship between men's studies and feminist thought
- 1.4** Analyze ways that intersectional issues influence the experience of womanhood
- 1.5** Describe the elements of a feminist sociological framework

Have you ever asked yourself:

Why do so many women spend so much time and money on beauty and diet products—even when some of these products are detrimental to their health?

Why is violence so much more likely to be committed by men—either against other men or against women and girls?

Why are there not more women in fields such as science and math, even though, when girls are young, they do at least as well, if not better, in these subjects at school?

Why has the United States never elected a woman president?

Why is there no national sport that routinely draws stadium-filling crowds and millions of weekly television viewers where all the athletes are women?

What would happen if every woman in the United States did no work for just one week?

You could ask yourself many questions like these—and you will find that such questions guide much of the content of this book. If you find these questions intriguing—or you want to know the answers—then you already have the kernel of imagination that can sprout the study of gender in society.

Gender refers to the cultural expectations and societal arrangements by which men and women have different experiences in society. As you will learn throughout this book, gender relations are complex, variable, and deeply entrenched in society. Gender shapes all facets of our experiences—what we think, how we interact with others, what

opportunities we have, and even how we walk and talk! There is no simple or single way to think about gender, but how gender affects women and men in society is a fascinating subject—and one that is essential to making social changes that will improve people's lives.

A Focus on Women: Taking Women Seriously

1.1 Explain Why Studying Women and the Feminist Movement is Important

It may seem that women have it made. Formal barriers to discrimination have been removed. The majority of women are employed, and they now number close to half of those in the workplace. Women have moved into many of the top professional positions, are now the majority of college graduates, and are more visible in positions of power than at any other time in the nation's history. The position of women in U.S. society, indeed in many places in the world, has changed dramatically.

Attitudes have changed, too. In 1970, 40 percent of the American public disapproved of women earning money in business if her husband could support her. Women and men differ significantly, however, on whether they perceive obstacles to women's success. About 54 percent of men think such obstacles are gone, whereas only 34 percent

of women think so (Gallup and the International Labour Organization 2017; Fingerhut 2016; Saad 2017). These changes have led many to conclude that women now have it made and that no further change is needed. Given these changes, why do we need a book now that focuses on women?

Consider the following facts:

- Today, women who work full-time earn, on average, 80 percent of what men earn working full-time, an improvement over time no doubt but an income gap nonetheless (Fontenot, Semega, and Kollar 2018).
- Twenty-seven percent of all households headed by women are poor; the rates are higher for African American women, Latinas, and Native American women (Fontenot, Semega, and Kollar 2018).
- Women of color are concentrated in the least-paid, lowest-status jobs in the labor market (U.S. Department of Labor 2018).
- Each year, almost one-half million women report rape or sexual assault, a small estimate given that most sexual assault goes unreported. An additional one million reported being victimized by domestic violence (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2016). The United States also elected a president who publicly and proudly said that he could grope women's genitals and get away with it because of his high status.

These facts indicate that although women have indeed come a long way, there is still a long way to go. Little wonder that there is a substantial gender gap in women's and men's perceptions of society's treatment of women: Women are more likely than men to perceive discrimination against women as a serious problem (see Figure 1.1).

Look around, and you will see many signs of the status of women in society. In a grocery store, for example, women are clustered in those departments (deli and bakery) that are least likely to lead to promotion. Men, on the other hand, predominate in departments such as produce and groceries, where the majority of store managers originate. In schools, women constitute a large majority of elementary school teachers, but through the higher grades and into college, women become a smaller proportion of the faculty. Despite the recent movement of more women into political office, the vast majority of those who make and enforce laws are men, particularly among those holding the most influential positions. And, the recently numerous public allegations of sexual harassment and assault by powerful, highly visible men, as well as the #MeToo movement, make it clear that women are routinely subjected to gender-based violence.

The influence of gender in society can also be observed in interpersonal interaction. Watch the behavior of men and women around you—how they act with each other and with those of the same sex. In public places, men touch women more often than women touch men. Men also

Media Matters: Sports, Sexism, and the Depiction of Women Athletes

The increased presence of women in sports has changed many of the old stereotypes about women's athletes. This does not mean, however, that gender parity in sports has been reached—not by a long shot. Sport remains a male-dominated institution, including in how women and men as athletes are depicted in the media.

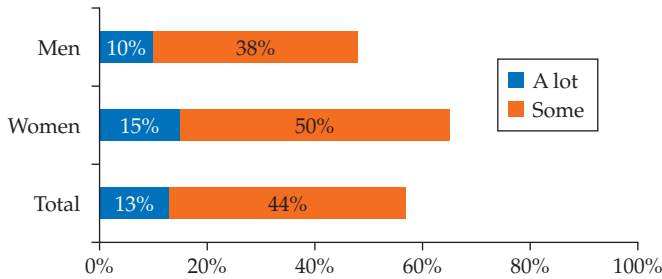
Sociologists Michela Musto, Cheryl Cooky, and Michael Messner have examined how the portrayal of women athletes has changed over the past 25 years, notably in televised coverage of women athletes. To begin with, they note that, even now, men are 95 percent of sports anchors, co-anchors, and analysts. They used formal content analysis to systematically compare and analyze the presentation of women and men players in basketball, baseball, and football on televised sports news. They observed the gender of the athlete (male, female, and neutral), the type of sport, the competitive level of the sport, and the length of time given to each sports segment, among other things. They also observed such things as visuals, graphics, music, and oral commentary to show how women and men were depicted. Additionally, they watched to see if the athletes were sexualized or treated through objectifying language or humor.

Among other things, these scholars found that women's sports receive less coverage than men's and, when they are covered, there is a less high-quality production value to the broadcast segment, such as by including fewer special effects, not having compelling music, and so forth. Commentators commonly and consistently used vocal inflections, high-volume exclamation, and rapid-fire speech when discussing men's athletic achievements, but did so less often for women. The researchers conclude that, comparing past to present, we have moved from a more overtly negative and demeaning coverage of women athletes to something that is more respectful but still lackluster when compared to how men are covered. The researchers developed the concept of *gender-bland sexism* to describe how women athletes are depicted in sports media. In the end, such coverage perpetuates the idea that men are the superior athletes, thereby reinforcing gender hierarchy in the world of sports.

SOURCE: Musto, Michela, Cheryl Cooky, and Michael A. Messner. 2017. "From Fizzle to Sizzle": Televised Sports News and the Production of Gender-Bland Sexism." *Gender & Society* 31 (October): 573–596.

Figure 1.1 Perceptions of Discrimination: Women and Men

% saying there is a lot or some discrimination against women in our society today.



SOURCE: Pew Research Center. 2015. "Women and Leadership: Public Says Women are Equally Qualified, but Barriers Persist." Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

touch women in more places on the body than women touch men. Despite stereotypes to the contrary, men also talk more than women and interrupt women more than women interrupt men or men interrupt each other. Women are more likely than men to smile when interacting with others (especially when with men), even when they are not necessarily happy. Men use more personal space. You can see this for yourself: Just ask everyone in your classroom to freeze in place. Chances are that you will see more men than women with their legs splayed out, regardless of their size. Although these patterns do not hold for all men and all women, nor necessarily for people from different cultural backgrounds, in general, they reflect the different ways that women and men have learned to interact.

Current social problems also call attention to the status of women in society. Violence against women—in the form of rape, sexual harassment, incest, and domestic abuse—is common. More families are headed by women and women's low wages mean that these families have an increased chance of being poor. As a result, the rate of poverty among children in such households is shockingly high. The national debate over health care also has particular implications for women. Although women live longer than men, they report more ill health than men do, spend their later years with more disabling conditions, and are more likely than men to take primary responsibility for the health of others in their families (National Center for Health Statistics 2017). These are just a few reasons why studying women remains so important.

Studying Women: Women's Studies and Feminism Scholarship

Thinking about women helps us understand why these things occur. For many years, very few people thought seriously about women. Social and economic patterns affecting the lives of women were taken for granted as natural or to

be expected. Few people questioned the status of women in society, presuming instead that studying women was trivial, something done only by a radical fringe or by frivolous thinkers.

Even now, after decades of serious scholarship about women, women's and gender studies is often attacked as not being serious scholarship. Studying women is often ridiculed or treated with contempt. However, by bringing attention to the study of gender, studying women has also opened new ways to think about and study men. Attacks on new multicultural studies, of which women's studies has been a strong part, have accused such studies of only striving for "political correctness" and weakening the traditional standards of higher education. Despite these claims however, women's studies has opened new areas for questioning, has corrected many of the omissions and distortions of the past, and has generated new knowledge—with important implications for social policy.

Women's studies, as a field of study, was established in the late 1960s and early 1970s to correct the inattention given to women in most academic fields. Women's studies is now a thriving field of study. Studying women and men as gendered subjects has required challenging some of the basic assumptions in existing knowledge—both in popular conceptions and in academic studies. Thinking about women changes how we think about human history and society and also revises how we understand the workings of social institutions. Thinking about women also reveals deep patterns of gender relations in contemporary society. Although much of the time these patterns go unnoticed, they influence us nonetheless. Gender—and its connection to race, class, and sexuality—influences who we are, what we think, and what opportunities are available to us. In this way, thinking about women is transformative because it informs us about women's experiences and changes our thinking about gender in society.

Focusing on women brings new questions to light and shows how gender shapes everyone's experience, including men's, as you will see especially in the boxed feature of this book, "A Closer Look at Men." Through focusing on women, we can see the influence of gender in society, raising new questions about men as well. Moreover, despite the changes that have occurred in women's lives, women remain disadvantaged relative to men, although, as we will see, this depends on race, social class, and sexual orientation, among other social factors.

The purpose of this book is to show how a sociological perspective explains women's lives and the structure of gender in society. A single book cannot discuss all of the research and theory that has been developed to understand gender in society, but it can show how thoroughly gender permeates the structure of society and women's and men's lives within it.



Everett Historical/Shutterstock

This modern image plays off the classic poster of “Rosie the Riveter”—a poster produced during World War II as a device to recruit women into wartime production.

Feminism: What’s in a Label?

Women’s studies is rooted in the feminist movement. Indeed, feminism and women’s studies emerged together as women sought to understand their experiences and put them in a framework to guide social change. Feminism is based on a philosophy of change—namely, that we can build a more just society for women if we consciously understand and seek to transform the social behaviors and institutions that are the basis for gender inequality. Consequently, developing women’s studies as an academic field is part of the process of transforming women’s place in society—a fundamental promise and premise of the feminist movement.

So, what is feminism? **Feminism** is not easy to define because it includes a variety of political perspectives and ideas. As you will discover, there is no single feminist perspective. Feminist theories and programs for social change sometimes differ quite substantially from one another. Moreover, feminism among young women has evolved compared to that of their feminist foremothers, as we will explore in the feature called “History Speaks” (see page 10).

First, feminism begins with the premise that women’s and men’s positions in society are the result of social, not natural or biological, factors. Although different varieties of feminist thoughts have developed, feminists generally understand social institutions and social attitudes as the basis for women’s position in society. Second, because there are structured inequities between women and men, feminists believe in transforming society on behalf of women. Feminism is a way of both thinking and acting; in fact, the union of action and thought is central to feminist programs for social change. Third, feminists believe that women’s experiences, concerns, and ideas are as valuable as those

of men and should be treated with equal seriousness and respect. This does not mean that women have to be like men, but that women’s interests should be central in movements for social change.

Public opinion polls indicate that the majority of women in the United States support feminist issues such as equal pay for equal work; improved child care policies; reduced violence against women; and greater opportunities for women regardless of their race, class, or sexual orientation. Why, then, is the label “feminist” so controversial? The word *feminism* conjures up different images to different people. As a result, many who might even agree with feminist ideas and programs for change find it difficult to call themselves feminists. Sometimes not calling oneself a feminist reflects actual disagreement with feminist policies and perspectives, but many people are also reluctant to call themselves feminists because they misunderstand what it means. Some associate feminism with man-hating; others reject feminism because of stereotypes about lesbians. Some think it is risky to call oneself a feminist, fearing that friends and lovers might reject or tease them. Some think that feminism is no longer necessary, assuming that discrimination has been eliminated by legal reforms and that women and men now stand on relatively equal terms before the law. Simply put, many are threatened by a movement that advocates change in women’s lives. At the same time, fears about feminism have also been deliberately cultivated by people who think the ascendance of women somehow threatens men—as if men’s status in society depends on the subordination of women.

Why is being a feminist so stigmatized? The label “feminist” conjures up images of aggressive fanatics, as if to be feminist means one cannot be gentle and kind, be



Associated Press

In 1968, one of the first feminist demonstrations was a protest against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Widely covered by the media, it called the public’s attention to how women were routinely defined in a demeaning way as sexual objects.

reasonable, or have good relationships with men. This is simply not true, as a careful look at the diverse women and men who call themselves feminists shows. Some will say, “I’m not a feminist; I’m a humanist,” reflecting their belief in the betterment of life for all persons—men and women alike. Such a view does not, however, preclude being a feminist. In fact, if one really is in favor of the betterment of all human beings, then it is logical to call oneself humanist, anti-racist, *and* feminist.

The fact that the label “feminist” carries a stigma reflects the deep and continuing devaluation of women throughout U.S. society. Popular stereotypes of feminists as angry, radical, man-hating “feminazis” encourage this kind of thinking. Some feminists are, indeed, angry—angry about the injustices women face in the workplace, angry about violence against women, angry about persecution of LGBTQ people, and angry about the persistent denigration of women in popular culture. Many feminists are also radical thinkers, particularly if we take *radical* to mean looking at the roots of women’s status in society. Feminism includes a wide range of feelings, thoughts, and ways of being—none of which are so narrow and ugly as the popular stereotype of feminists suggests.

Many feminists are also men, although men may find calling themselves feminists especially difficult. Adopting a pro-woman attitude puts men and women at odds with the dominant culture. Men may think that by calling themselves feminists, they will be thought of as gay, which itself is a stigmatized identity in the dominant culture. Such labeling is rooted in the homophobic attitudes of our culture, and, as you will see in Chapter 4, it is a form of social control—society’s way of trying to force men and women into narrowly proscribed gender roles. Men who call themselves feminists—some of whom are gay, some of whom are not—are men who support women’s rights, who do not believe men are superior to women, and who are willing to work for liberating social changes for women and men. This shows another point learned from feminism—that men are subjected to cultural expectations about masculinity that affect their emotions, identities, and social roles.

The fact is that feminism is threatening to those who want to protect the status quo. Some far-right, conservative groups have targeted women’s studies programs, accusing

them of being like-minded, distributing misinformation, and brainwashing women. The fact is that becoming a feminist does change the way you think, because it gives you a critical awareness of relationships and social systems that you might have previously taken for granted. And, feminist programs for change would dismantle the privileges that many (though not all) men get simply by virtue of being men. However, the negativity associated with feminism is a serious impediment to improving women’s lives.

Although not everyone who reads this book will be or become a feminist, each reader should at least be willing to examine the questions that feminism raises in order to learn what constitutes feminist thinking. Doing so will help you describe and understand women’s and men’s experience in contemporary social institutions and make informed judgments about social policies and actions that affect all people’s lives.

Connecting the Personal and the Political: A Sociological Perspective

1.2 Relate the Sociological Perspective to the Study of Women

Patterns in gender relations are found throughout society, although much of the time these patterns remain invisible to most people. At some point, however, you may start to notice them. Perhaps at school you see that women tend to major in different subjects than men or that men tend to be more outspoken in class. Perhaps at work you notice that women are concentrated in the lowest-level jobs and are sometimes treated as if they were not even present. It may occur to you one night as you are walking through city streets that the bright lights shining in the night skyline represent the thousands of women—many of them African American, Latina, Asian American, or immigrant women—who clean the corporate suites and offices for organizations that are headed by White men, or, even increasingly, a few White women.

Recognizing these events as indications of the status of women helps you see inequities in the experiences of

Hot Topics: What's New(s) about #MeToo?

Numerous revelations about high profile cases of sexual harassment have mobilized women to speak out against this form of sexual violence. As many women revealed their own experiences of sexual harassment through such things as #MeToo on twitter, Facebook, and other social media, many national commentators expressed surprise at how common place

sexual assault has been. Yet, women have been speaking out against sexual violence in all its forms since the inception of the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s. Do you think that the increased exposure of the extent of sexual assault will, in fact, lessen its occurrence? Why or why not?

Focus on Research: Millennials and Feminism

Many people think that the millennial generation (those born in the 1980s and 1990s) do not identify as feminist and do not engage in feminist activism. Recent actions, such as the Women's March that followed Donald Trump's inauguration and drew millions of women around the world into peaceful demonstrations, challenge this assumption. But what do we really know about millennial attitudes and activism when it comes to feminist values?

This question has been answered through research by sociologist Alison Dahl Crossley. Crossley interviewed college students at three U.S. universities as well as using survey data and participant observation to learn about millennial women's and men's feminist activism. She found that, contrary to widespread belief, both the women and men support feminist positions even

if they do not explicitly identify themselves as feminist. One of her most important findings is that millennials do not see gender inequality as a singular phenomenon. Rather, they understand that gender, race, sexual, and class inequality are interrelated. And they also understand, based on their campus experience, the importance of coalition building.

Crossley's research teaches us that feminist activism takes many forms and may differ for different generations and different groups. Her research also shows some of the different methods by which people can express their feminist values.

SOURCE: Crossley, Alison Dahl. 2017. *Finding Feminism: Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution*. New York: New York University Press.

men and women in society. Once you begin to recognize these patterns, you may be astounded at how pervasive they are. As the unequal status of women becomes more apparent, you might feel overwhelmed by the vast extent of a problem most people have never acknowledged. What you see might become troubling, and you may find it difficult to imagine how these long-standing inequities can be changed. But once you start to question the position of women in society, you will want to know more and will begin to ask questions such as: What is the status of women in society? How did things become this way? How can we change the inequalities that women experience?

Adrienne Rich (1976), a classic feminist thinker and poet, suggested almost 40 years ago that simply asking "What is life like for women?" creates a new awareness of the status of women in society and history. Whether it is asking "Why is there so much violence against women?" or "Why is it that women clean the offices and men manage them?"—by virtue of asking, you are creating new questions and issues for investigation. It is this process of questioning that gives birth to a sociological and a feminist imagination.

The **sociological imagination** was first described by C. Wright Mills (1916–1962), an eminent sociologist and radical in his time. Mills's radicalism was founded, in part, on his passionate belief that the task of sociology is to understand the relationship between individuals and the society in which they live. He argued that sociological understanding must be used in the reconstruction of more just social institutions. Except for the masculine references in his language, his words still provide a compelling argument that sociology must make sense of the experiences of women and men as they exist in contemporary society. He writes:

Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday world, they cannot overcome their troubles, and, in this feeling, they are often quite correct. What ordinary men are directly aware of and what

they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his experience and gauge his fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstance. (Mills 1959: 3–5).

Mills's ideas are strikingly parallel to the feminist argument that women can see how their private experiences are rooted in social conditions by discovering their shared experiences with other women. In fact, Mills professes that the central task of sociology is to understand personal biography and social structure and the relations between the two. His argument is best illustrated in the distinction he makes between personal troubles and social issues.

Personal troubles are part of the personal experience of an individual. They are privately felt and they involve only those persons and events in an individual's immediate surroundings. **Public issues** are events that originate beyond one's immediate experience, even though they are still felt in private life. Public issues involve the structure of social institutions and their historical development. Mills's own example is that of marriage. He says, "Inside a marriage a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of every 1,000 attempts, this is an indication of a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them" (Mills 1959:9). Mills's point is that events that are felt as personal troubles often have their origins in the public issues that emerge from specific historical and social conditions.

Another example is that of a woman who is beaten by her partner. She experiences deep personal trouble. Perhaps

her situation appears to her as unique or as only a private problem. But, when others in the society have the same experience, then it becomes a public issue. Common patterns in the experiences of battered women reveal that battering is more than just a private matter. It has its origin in complex social institutions that define women as subordinate to men and men as holding power over women—in other words, in power relationships formed by gender. In this sense, battering is *both a personal trouble and a public issue*. As Mills would conclude, it is then a subject for sociological study. For feminists, this junction between personal experience and the social organization of gender roles is also a starting point for thinking about women.

The relationship between personal troubles and public issues reveals an essential premise of the sociological perspective—that individual life is situated in specific social and historical environments. These environments condition not only what our experience is but also how we think about it. Thinking about women from a sociological perspective asks us to look beyond the taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world and, instead, to see how social structures generate the patterns of everyday life. The concept of social structure is central to sociology. **Social structure** refers to the organization of society that shapes social behavior and social attitudes (see Table 1.1). This is a broad and abstract concept, one that emphasizes the collective and social basis for behavior, not individual motivations and actions. Of course, abstract realities such as social structure ultimately have their origins in how individuals behave, but it is the collective and persistent results of that behavior that make social structures. Social structures shape individual and group choices, opportunities, and experiences. People can feel the effects of social structures in most of what they do. The observation of social structure is the basis for sociological inquiries.

The concept of *social structure* is aptly described in the feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye’s discussion of oppression. Frye uses the metaphor of a birdcage. Suppose that you are the bird in the cage. If you look only at one wire, you cannot see the other wires. You miss seeing the whole because you are focusing only on one part. Even if you look at each wire, discovering all of its properties, you will still

not see the whole. Only when you step back from the cage and look at its structure as a whole—seeing all of the parts in relationship to each other—can you understand why the bird cannot escape the cage. As Frye writes, it is then

perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but all of which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon. It is now possible to see and recognize: One can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced (Frye 1983: 4–5).

Oppression and social structure are not the same thing. Some social structures are clearly beneficial to some groups. Frye’s metaphor, however, helps us understand the meaning of social structure. Studying oppressed groups helps us see the social structural basis for group oppression.

As you will see throughout this book, gender is one element of social structure that, along with class and race, shapes the experience of all groups in society. This book uses a sociological perspective—that is, one that helps us see the structural origins of individual and group experiences in society. The study of women requires more than a sociological perspective, however. This means that the perspectives of multiple disciplines—whether history, anthropology, psychology, economics, or the humanities—contribute to understanding the position of women in society. Although the primary focus of this book is sociological, much of the research on which each chapter is based is also interdisciplinary.

What about Men?

1.3 Describe the Relationship between Men’s Studies and Feminist Thought

As you can see from the title of this book, women are the major focus of study here. However, when you think about women, you also have to think about men. Men have traditionally been such a primary focal point that many people

Table 1.1 A Sea Change in Women’s and Men’s Attitudes

	2000		2015	
	Percent who strongly agree:		Percent who strongly agree:	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.	25%	14%	39%	24%
Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women.	21%	24%	20%	17%
It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.	11%	10%	6%	5%

A Closer Look at Men: Angry White Men

As women's lives have changed, so have men's. How have men responded to this shifting landscape of gender relations? Of course, there is no single answer—in part because men's lives and attitudes are just as varied as are women's. However, in addition, the shifting landscape has not been solely about gender. Race and class relations have changed as well, leaving some White men responding by feeling left behind and without the same compass that guided their lives in the not too distant past. Some men have responded with anger—anger that they can no longer count on steady work, a predictable future, and a life where their rights as White men are unchallenged.

Sociologist Michael Kimmel has studied men who feel that they have been left behind betrayed while others have seemingly moved ahead of them. Rather than criticizing the economic structures that have changed their life circumstances, the men Kimmel studied blame women, blame minorities, and blame immigrants for taking resources that are rightfully theirs. The men Kimmel studied feel they are left behind, creating a feeling Kimmel calls *aggrieved entitlement*. Further, right-wing commentators fuel the men's feelings through narratives that immigrants and people of color are getting things they do not deserve.

Sometimes, the men's anger turns into violence. But, more common are displays of *hypermasculinity* and exhortations against political correctness. Although Kimmel's research was done before the election of Donald Trump, he has subsequently drawn on his research to explain Trump's support among White working-class men. More than anything, the men in Kimmel's study want to reclaim their place in society, possibly even through rolling back the gains that others have made as U.S. society has opened up opportunities for those previously excluded.

Kimmel's research shows how important it is to understand the social forces that affect not just women's lives but also men's. Kimmel shows that some men's anger is real, but it is displaced. Women and people of color are not trying to steal men's place in society. Men's displacement, as C. Wright Mills would say, is the result of structural forces that have a direct impact on men's lives. Kimmel argues that we have to understand why men they feel as they do and that we must use the lens of social and historical analysis to understand, empathize with, and change men's predicament.

SOURCE: Michael Kimmel. 2015. *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New York: Nation Books.

seem to assume (falsely) that focusing on women is somehow out of balance. As we have seen, gender shapes men's experiences, as well as women's. Studying gender then raises new questions about men and interprets men and masculinity in light of society's gendered patterns. And, as we have also seen, women remain disadvantaged relative to men, although this depends on other factors too, including race, social class, and sexual orientation.

The development of more inclusive work on women has spawned the development of another new field: **men's studies**. As scholars have revised their thinking about women, they have likewise reconsidered the lives of men (Kimmel and Messner 2013). Men's studies challenges the patriarchal bias in traditional scholarship, which has tended to take men as the given universal standard against which others are judged.

Men's studies is also explicitly feminist. In fact, men's studies emerged from the women's movement when men, too, began to see how gender and sexism shaped their lives. The study of men challenges existing sexist norms just as women's studies does. Men's studies also has an activist stance. It is not just knowing about men that is important. Men's studies encourages using that knowledge to create a more just world.

Like women's studies, men's studies takes gender as a central feature of social life, seeing how gender shapes men's ideas and opportunities; thus, men's studies is not

just about men but sees men as gendered beings. Without men's studies, there is a tendency to presume that only women are gendered, as if gender affects only one group. We know, however, that gender affects the experiences of us all, although in different ways, depending on factors such as one's social class, sexual orientation, nationality, or race. Because of this, men's studies sees diversity among men as important to understanding men's lives. In addition, although men's studies does not assume that all men are sexist in their attitudes and beliefs, there is an understanding that *as a group* men benefit from gender privilege. Again, however, social class and race along with gender shape the social structure of privilege.

Gender Matters . . . and so do Race, Class, and Sexuality

1.4 Analyze Ways that Intersectional Issues Influence the Experience of Womanhood

The transformation of knowledge through women's studies has shown the inadequacy of generalizing from studies of men to our knowledge about women. **Faulty generalization** takes knowledge from one group

experience and incorrectly extends that knowledge to another (Minnich 1990). Women's studies has shown how *not* to generalize from the experience of men to the experience of women. Similarly, studies by and about women of color have shown the importance of not generalizing from the experiences of White, middle-class women to all women. Doing so would only replace one false universal (White men) with another (White women).

Developing inclusive thinking reminds us that women's experiences vary by race, class, age, sexual orientation, and other social factors. Although women as a group share many common experiences, recognizing and understanding the diversity of those experiences are equally important in the construction of descriptions and theories about women's lives.

For example, much is now known about the "second-shift" women experience whenever they are employed and also do most of the housework in their homes. However, this is not a new development for African American women, who, since slavery, have worked in the homes and raised the children of White women while also caring for their own families. Analyses of domestic work that ignore the domestic labor of women of color, including the relations with White women that such a labor system creates, are faulty and incomplete. One of the major challenges for feminist studies is to create knowledge that penetrates the complex dynamics of race, class, and gender relations in shaping the experience of all persons.

Gender, race, sexuality, and class are overlapping categories of experience that shape the experiences of all people in the United States. This means that race relations shape the experiences of White people *and* the experiences of people of color but in different ways. In the same vein, gender shapes the experiences of women and the experiences of men and women, as well as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people (now referred to as LGBTQ people). Furthermore, class relations affect not just the poor and working class but also the experiences of elites and the middle class.

Each of these identities also overlaps with the others, resulting in distinct experiences depending on a person's social location in one such category or another. Individuals may feel the salience of one or another at a given time, but their life experiences are shaped by the confluence of all. As an example, an Asian American woman who hears a derogatory remark about Asian Americans experiences racism, but she may also be stereotyped as a woman. That stereotype, however, is likely to be unique to Asian American women (e.g., that they are submissive and passive), whereas a gender stereotype about another racial group of women may manifest itself differently (e.g.,

that all blondes are dumb). An Asian American woman's experience will depend not only on her gender and race but also on her class. Her identity at any given time may be centered in any one or more of these experiences, but the point is that her position in society (including the opportunities available to her and what people think of her) is conditioned by her race, class, *and* gender position.

This perspective on the simultaneity of gender, race, sexuality, and class is different from a so-called *additive model*. The term *double jeopardy*, for example, has been used to describe the disadvantage that women of color experience because of their race and their gender. This phrase, however, conjures up images of race and gender as separate experiences, whereas they are integrally related in the experiences of different groups. Race, class, sexual orientation, and gender form a **matrix of domination**, meaning the particular configuration of race, class, and gender relations in society that together establishes an interlocking system of domination; not one of them can really be understood without understanding the others (Collins 1990; Andersen and Collins 2016; Collins and Bilge 2016).

Consider the following: White women may be privileged by their race but disadvantaged by their gender and class. Likewise, African American men may be privileged by their gender, but not necessarily by their race or social class. In fact, thinking about race and class oppression in the lives of African American, Native American, and Latino men makes a term such as *male privilege* seem out of place. Although men of color may have gender privilege relative to women within their group, relative to White women, they likely do not. Analyses that are inclusive of race, class, and gender also do not see White men as a monolithic group, although White men have historically benefited from their gender and race position. However, class differences among them—as well as differences in White men's behavior and



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Thousands in Philadelphia unite in solidarity with the Women's March.