

Chapter 4

Gender Inequality

1. Understanding Sex and Gender

- Define sex, gender, femininity, and masculinity.
- Critically assess the evidence on biology, culture and socialization, and gender.
- Discuss agents of gender socialization.

Section Outline

- **Gender as a Social Construction:** Gender is a social concept. It refers to the social and cultural differences a society assigns to people based on their (biological) sex. A related concept, gender roles, refers to a society's expectations of people's behavior and attitudes based on whether they are females or males.
- **The Development of Gender Differences:** What accounts for differences in female and male behavior and attitudes? Do the biological differences between the sexes account for these other differences? Or do these latter differences stem, as most sociologists think, from cultural expectations and from differences in the ways in which the sexes are socialized? These are critical questions.

Key Takeaways

- Sex is a biological concept, while gender is a social concept and refers to the social and cultural differences a society assigns to people based on their sex.
- Several biological explanations for gender roles exist, but sociologists think culture and socialization are more important sources of gender roles than biology.
- Families, schools, peers, the mass media, and religion are agents of socialization for the development of gender identity and gender roles.

For Your Review

1. Write a short essay about one or two events you recall from your childhood that reflected or reinforced your gender socialization.
2. Do you think gender roles are due more to biology or to culture and socialization? Explain your answer.

Key Terms

- **Sex** -- The anatomical and other biological differences between females and males that are determined at the moment of conception and develop in the womb and throughout childhood and adolescence.
- **Primary Sex Characteristics** -- Anatomical and other biological differences between females and males that begin developing in the womb.
- **Secondary Sex Characteristics** -- Biological differences between females and males that emerge during puberty.
- **Gender** -- The social and cultural differences a society assigns to people based on their biological sex.
- **Gender Roles** -- A society's expectations of people's behavior and attitudes based on whether they are females or males.
- **Gender Identity** -- Individuals' beliefs about themselves as either females or males.
- **Femininity** -- Cultural expectations of girls and women, including gentleness and attractiveness.

- **Masculinity** -- Cultural expectations of boys and men, including toughness and bravery.
- **Androgynous** -- Containing aspects of both femaleness and maleness, or of both femininity and masculinity.
- **Socialization** -- The process whereby individuals learn the culture of their society.

2. Feminism and Sexism

- Define feminism, sexism, and patriarchy.
- Discuss evidence for a decline in sexism.

Section Outline

- **The Growth of Feminism and the Decline of Sexism:** National surveys show that the public has moved away from traditional views of gender toward more modern ones. Another way of saying this is that the public has moved from sexism toward feminism.

Key Takeaways

- Feminism refers to the belief that women and men should have equal opportunities in economic, political, and social life, while sexism refers to a belief in traditional gender role stereotypes and in the inherent inequality between men and women.
- Sexist beliefs have declined in the United States since the early 1970s.

For Your Review

1. Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?

2. Think about one of your parents or of another adult much older than you. Does this person hold more traditional views about gender than you do? Explain your answer.

Key Terms

- **Feminism** -- The belief that women and men should be equal.
- **Sexism** -- The belief that women are inferior to men.
- **Patriarchy** -- Male domination.

3. Dimensions of Gender Inequality

- Summarize the status of women around the world today.
- Understand the extent of and reasons for gender inequality in income and the workplace in the United States.
- Understand the extent of and reasons for sexual harassment.

Section Outline

- **The Global Inequality of Women:** More than 1.4 billion people on earth are desperately poor, their ranks include more than their fair share of women, who are estimated to make up 70 percent of the world's poor. Because women tend to be poorer than men worldwide, they are more likely than men to experience all the problems that poverty causes, including malnutrition and disease
- **Gender Inequality in the United States:** As the 1980s began, full-time women workers' median weekly earnings were about 65 percent of men's. Women have narrowed the gender gap in earnings since then: Their weekly earnings now (2011) are 82.2 percent of men's among full-time workers ages 16 and older.

Key Takeaways

- Among full-time workers, women earn about 79.4 percent of men’s earnings. This gender gap in earnings stems from several factors, including sex segregation in the workplace and the lower wages and salaries found in occupations that involve mostly women.
- Sexual harassment results partly from women’s subordinate status in the workplace and may involve up to two-thirds of women employees.
- Women of color may face a “triple burden” of difficulties based on their gender, their race/ethnicity, and their social class.

For Your Review

1. Do you think it is fair for occupations dominated by women to have lower wages and salaries than those dominated by men? Explain your answer.
2. If you know a woman who works in a male-dominated occupation, interview her about any difficulties she might be experiencing as a result of being in this sort of situation.

Key Terms

- **Sex Segregation** -- In the workplace, the concentration of women in a relatively few low-paying clerical and service jobs.
- **Comparable Worth** -- The idea that women’s and men’s jobs may be of roughly equal value and thus deserve the same pay, even though women’s jobs typically pay less than men’s jobs.
- **Glass Ceiling** -- The invisible barrier facing women as they try to advance in the

workplace.

- **Glass Escalator** -- The smooth path afforded men in promotion in the workplace, especially in occupations primarily filled by women.
- **Sexual Harassment** -- Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is used as a condition of employment or promotion or that interferes with an individual's job performance and creates an intimidating or hostile environment.

4. Violence Against Women: Rape and Sexual Assault

- Describe the extent of rape and sexual assault.
- Explain why rape and sexual assault occur.

Section Outline

- **The Extent and Context of Rape and Sexual Assault:** Research indicates that up to one-third of US women will experience a rape or sexual assault, including attempts, at least once in their lives.
- **Explaining Rape and Sexual Assault:** These three cultural beliefs—that women enjoy being forced to have sex, that they ask or deserve to be raped, and that men should be sexually assertive or even aggressive—combine to produce a cultural recipe for rape. Although most men do not rape, the cultural beliefs and myths just described help account for the rapes that do occur.

Key Takeaways

- Up to one-third of U.S. women experience a rape or sexual assault, including attempts, in their lifetime.
- Rape and sexual assault result from a combination of structural and cultural

factors. In states and nations where women are more unequal, rape rates tend to be higher.

For Your Review

1. What evidence and reasoning indicate that rape and sexual assault are not just the result of psychological problems affecting the men who engage in these crimes?
2. Write a brief essay in which you critically evaluate the cultural beliefs that contribute to rape and sexual assault.

5. The Benefits and Costs of Being Male

- List some of the benefits of being male.
- List some of the costs of being male.

Section Outline

- **Benefits:** Male privilege is the advantages that males automatically have in a patriarchal society whether or not they realize they have these advantages. A few examples illustrate male privilege. Men can usually walk anywhere they want or go into any bar they want without having to worry about being raped or sexually harassed.
- **Costs:** Scholars are increasingly pointing to the problems men face in a society that promotes male domination and traditional standards of masculinity such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and toughness. Socialization into masculinity is thought to underlie many of the emotional problems men experience,

Key Takeaways

- In a patriarchal society, males automatically have certain advantages, including a

general freedom from fear of being raped and sexually assaulted and from experiencing job discrimination on the basis of their gender.

- Men also suffer certain disadvantages from being male, including higher rates of injury, violence, and death and a lower likelihood of experiencing the joy that parenting often brings.

For Your Review

1. What do you think is the most important advantage, privilege, or benefit that men enjoy in the United States? Explain your answer.
2. What do you think is the most significant cost or disadvantage that men experience? Again, explain your answer.

Key Terms

- **Male Privilege** -- The advantages a male enjoys in a patriarchal society just because he is a male.

6. Reducing Gender Inequality

- Describe any three policies or programs that should help reduce gender inequality.
- Discuss possible ways of reducing rape and sexual assault.

Section Outline

- Certain government efforts, including increased financial support for childcare, should help reduce gender inequality.
- If gender inequality lessens, rape and sexual assault should decrease as well.

Key Takeaways

- Certain government efforts, including increased financial support for child care, should help reduce gender inequality.

- If gender inequality lessens, rape and sexual assault should decrease as well.

For Your Review

1. To reduce gender inequality, do you think efforts should focus more on changing socialization practices or on changing policies in the workplace and schools? Explain your answer.
2. How hopeful are you that rape and sexual assault will decrease significantly in your lifetime?