

## Chapter 2

# Gender: In Pink and Blue and Vivid Color

To see that all knowledge is a construction and that truth is a matter of the context in which it is embedded is to greatly expand the possibilities of how to think about anything, even those things we consider to be the most elementary and obvious.

—*Field Belenky*

### Personal Experience and Gender

As we explore what it means to be male or female, feminine or masculine, pay close attention to your reaction to the information. Are you nodding in agreement, are you rejecting various elements, are you confused? In order to resolve any dissonance between past beliefs and “knowledge,” and current information, you will need to actively decide what blend you believe to be accurate and true. The first experiential step to explore what you have come to understand about gender in both your thoughts and your behavior is the Gender Journey in Personal Inventory 2.1 (Orenstein 1994, xii). As you analyze your two journeys as a girl and as a boy, it will begin to be clear that some of your experiences represent clear choice, some have been explicitly chosen for you, and some have been subtly suggested to you. Examples of a relatively independent or gender neutral choice may be the food you eat or the type of music you listen to. Expressions of your gender that were most likely directed by your parents and perhaps the media include the clothes, toys, and room decorations of babyhood and early childhood.

Consider another scenario. After having three boys in a row, Jennifer’s parents were thrilled when she was born. Her parents and grandparents, aunts, and uncles lavished her with gifts—lacy pink dresses, tiny pearl necklaces, china tea sets, and delicate dolls. After years of wearing pink dresses and bows as a baby, toddler, and young girl, Jennifer *decided* that this is what girls wear to be feminine and beautiful. She decorated her room in lavender and pink and *chose* ruffles on the bedspread with lots of dolls and stuffed animals piled on the bed. By the time she was in high school, her old jewelry box with the musical ballerina was crammed with



### Personal Inventory 2.1 The Gender Journey

Transport yourself to the time when you were a junior in high school. Picture yourself in one of your classes. Pay attention to where you are sitting and the way you are sitting. Then think about the following questions:

1. What were you wearing and how was your hair styled?
2. What kind of shoes, jewelry, or makeup were you wearing?
3. How was your bedroom at home decorated? What were the colors? What was on the walls?
4. Who were your friends outside of class?
5. What kinds of activities did you participate in outside of school?
6. What clubs or organizations did you belong to?
7. What did you do for fun?

Now picture yourself in seventh grade. Again, situate yourself in one of your classes and ask these same questions.

Next, imagine yourself in second grade and once again ask the questions above.

Finally, take one more step back in time to the day you were born. Imagine the excitement of your family and answer the questions below:

8. Were your parents expecting a boy or a girl?
9. What do you imagine your parents and other relatives might have said when they discovered what sex you were?
10. What kind of clothes and stuffed animals and toys do you think people bought for you?

Now pause for a moment. Take a breath. Imagine that same instant of your birth, but this time envision that you were born the opposite sex. With this new identity take the journey back through time. Visualize yourself, again, at the moment of your birth and ask the same questions as if your sex had been different. Go back to second grade, then seventh grade, and finally to a junior year in high school. Ask all of the same questions you asked the first time.

When you complete this journey forward through time as the opposite sex, take a moment and write down all of the things that were the same and all of the things that were different depending on what sex you were born as. Were you dressed in pink or blue as a baby? Did you wear dresses or pants to school? Did your friends play baseball, dolls, or both? Did you sit with your legs crossed or wide open? Did you curl or blow dry your hair or just let it hang after washing? Did your bedroom have pictures of dancers, animals, race cars, or athletes hanging on the walls?

Source: Peggy Orenstein (1994).

earrings and necklaces that she sorted through daily to find the right match for her outfit. Her parents and girlfriends commented on how sweet and pretty and feminine she was and her teachers complimented Jennifer on her quiet well-mannered behavior. By junior high school, boys began calling Jennifer and noticed the same things her friends, teachers and parents had been telling her for years. While Jennifer may have felt that she was making independent choices, the early choices made for her and the support and reinforcement she received for their continuation constituted a perhaps unintentional, but subtle, way of leading her to a particular set of characteristics that defined her femininity, her gender identity.

However, boys and girls can also be raised to make their own choices early on. They may be presented with Legos or easy-bake ovens from which to choose. Their rooms may be decorated in yellow or red with gender-neutral pictures on the walls. Girls and boys may also rebel against the gender expression that was chosen for them as young children. A girl might decide that she hates dresses and pink and dolls and prefers trucks and football. A boy may decide he hates sports and mud and prefers dolls and playing house. These options have become increasingly acceptable in some subcultures in the United States, but in many communities girls who make nontraditional gender choices are called “tomboys” and boys who make these choices are called “sissies.”

Later in the chapter, the issues of gender identification and socialization will be systematically explored and analyzed. But for now, focus on your own experience as a boy or a girl, working to trace and describe your childhood without judging, defending, or criticizing it. To continue the process of understanding your experience of gender, take the quiz in Personal Inventory 2.2. This quiz analyzes a set of elements in your life that serve as indicators of how you were raised to express your “masculinity” or “femininity” and what choices you made in that context.

- If you scored 12–15 points, your gender socialization as a child tended to match the culture’s definition of traditionally masculine.
- If you scored 5–8 points, you were socialized to express your gender as more traditionally feminine.
- If you scored 9–11 points, your gender socialization as a child tended to be mixed or neutral.

As you examine your score, resist again the pull to judge and evaluate your experience. Instead, use these rough indicators as a means to understand what you were told and how you behaved according to standard definitions of masculinity and femininity. Understand that there are no right or wrong answers, but rather descriptions that will serve as a foundation, an underpinning to analyze and reconstruct what you have learned explicitly and implicitly about what it means to be male or female in U.S. society.

Try one more exercise in Personal Inventory 2.3 to investigate your current



## Personal Inventory 2.2 Childhood and Gender Quiz

### Instructions

Mark those answers that come closest to matching elements of your life. Select an answer if even one part of the item listed is correct and write the number of points in the blank in front of the correct answer. Select the one answer that comes closest to matching your experience. When you have completed the quiz, total your score.

- Which of the toys or games below were your favorites to play with as a young child?
  - dolls, paper dolls, tea sets, or play kitchen toys (1 point)
  - Candyland, Chutes and Ladders, Monopoly, Yahzee, Checkers, Chess (2 points)
  - action figures, toy guns, toy cars and trucks, toy tools (3 points)
- What kind of interactive play with other children was your favorite?
  - playing dolls, house, or hopscotch (1 point)
  - playing board games, riding bicycles (2 points)
  - softball, football, baseball, play war or forts (3 points)
- As a young child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
  - a mother or father, a model, teacher, dancer, nurse, secretary (1 point)
  - a musician, salesperson (2 points)
  - a firefighter, police officer, truck driver, doctor, lawyer, architect, athlete (3 points)
- What household chores were you given as a child?
  - setting or clearing the table, helping with cooking, dusting, washing dishes (1 point)
  - cleaning bathrooms, sweeping, making your bed, keeping your own room clean (2 points)
  - taking out the trash, raking leaves, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow (3 points)
- Which of the statements below comes closest to what you were told (or what you learned by observing) as a child about what you were supposed to do if your body or feelings were hurt?
  - "Oh, sweetheart, I'm so sorry that happened. Go ahead and cry. I know that hurts." (1 point)
  - "If you're hurt really badly, go ahead and cry if you have to. But don't make such a big deal out of things." (2 points)
  - "Buck up. You're big now. Big boys (or girls) don't cry. Be a little man (or little woman)." (3 points)

experience as a male or female. This is most useful when a group of five or more people of eighteen years or older works simultaneously and compares answers.

After answering the questions, compare your total products and hours of preparation to the totals of other men and women and see if you detect any patterns. Generally, this activity reveals that there is somewhat of a continuum based on whether you are male or female. People who report spending two hours or more preparing for a special event are principally women. There is somewhat of a gender mix in the one-hour range. But those people who jump in and out of the shower and run a comb through their hair are most frequently men.

Are these preparations biologically hardwired? Probably not. Does our culture socialize us in such a way that primping and pampering seems more feminine? Probably so. There are some clear implications for traditional masculine and feminine socialization. "[T]o fail at the feminine difference is to appear not to care about men, and to risk the loss of their attention and approval. To be insufficiently feminine is viewed as a failure in core sexual identity" (Brownmiller 1984, 15).

According to a study conducted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), girls emerge from their teen years with reduced expectations and less confidence than boys. In fact, this drop in self-esteem is reflected in lowered scores on standardized tests (AAUW 1995, 62). Gender socialization has profound consequences that are emotional and financial and impact the experience of success for both men and women.

In the next section of this chapter, the *reconstructing knowledge* approach will be used to build a framework for analysis of the experiences you have reported above.

### Reconstructing Knowledge and Gender

Gender socialization is a universal experience. Even if parents work very hard to raise their children with gender neutrality, input from grandparents and other adults, peers, and the media provides daily cues and information about what it means to be a boy or a girl. When my daughter was born, she had almost no hair. Yet in spite of that, and without my consent, the hospital allowed a photographer to tape a pink bow on her bald head and try to sell us the photographs.

My daughter and son are fifteen months apart and were both in diapers at the same time. It was just at that time, 1987, that major diaper companies began decorating their diapers and plain disposable diapers became unfashionable and difficult to find. There were blue diapers (for boys) with drawings of trucks and cars and baseball bats, and pink diapers (for girls) with pictures of teddy bears and ballerinas. According to the manufacturers, these diapers were designed anatomically to specifically fit boys or girls. Had I wanted to switch diapers I may have reduced stereotypes and increased wetness. There are not many choices under these circumstances.

Sex is determined biologically. When you are born, the doctor informs your



### Personal Inventory 2.3 Gender and the Fine Art of Preening

#### Instructions

Think of an extremely special and somewhat formal occasion that you are preparing to attend. You want to look and feel exceptionally good. The occasion could be a prom, a dance, a wedding, or some other formal event. Think of all of the items you need and activities you plan to prepare yourself for this event. Mark everything that you would use and do on the list below and add anything else you that is not on the list.

**Preparation Activities** (Indicate the amount of time in hours that each activity will take and then add the total of all of the activities.)

shopping for clothes \_\_\_\_\_  
 ironing \_\_\_\_\_  
 going to the cleaners \_\_\_\_\_  
 going to the hairdresser or barber \_\_\_\_\_  
 taking a nap \_\_\_\_\_  
 taking a bath or shower \_\_\_\_\_  
 shaving \_\_\_\_\_  
 manicure or pedicure \_\_\_\_\_  
 any other preparation activities \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other activities \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL HOURS \_\_\_\_\_

**Products** (Write the number beside each product you use; be sure to indicate separate numbers for each product. So if you use 5 different kinds of lotion, write 5 in the blank. Then add the total number of products.)

toothpaste \_\_\_\_\_  
 deodorant \_\_\_\_\_  
 shampoo \_\_\_\_\_  
 conditioner \_\_\_\_\_  
 hair products \_\_\_\_\_  
 lotion \_\_\_\_\_  
 soap \_\_\_\_\_  
 body gel \_\_\_\_\_  
 perfume, cologne or aftershave \_\_\_\_\_  
 bubble bath \_\_\_\_\_  
 facial masque or lotion \_\_\_\_\_  
 make-up \_\_\_\_\_  
 any other products you would use to prepare \_\_\_\_\_  
 TOTAL PRODUCTS \_\_\_\_\_

parents that you are a boy or a girl according to your genitals. Other characteristics that are determined by your sex and hormones are breasts, menstruation, relative hairiness, and to some degree bone and muscle structure. It is important to note that there are some babies who are born with ambiguous genitalia. These families and children have difficult decisions to make and a whole set of issues to face that are beyond the scope of this book.

But gender is something entirely different. Gender is constructed socially, culturally, and psychologically. In fact, many studies have demonstrated that roles of males and females vary in different cultures. Anthropologist Margaret Mead conducted studies with three different tribes in New Guinea and found that in one tribe both sexes behaved in ways that were considered traditionally feminine in the United States: nurturing, passive, peaceful, and deferential. In a second tribe, men and women assumed gender roles that are regarded in the United States as traditional: the men were aggressive hunter-gatherers, with most of their work occurring outside the home and hearth, while the women were peaceful nurturers who took care of the children and worked inside the home. In a third tribe, the roles were reversed and the women played the U.S. version of traditionally masculine roles while the men assumed traditionally feminine roles (Mead 1935). "What we do know with confidence is that however strong the influence of biology may be, it seldom, if ever, determines behavior. It *influences* behavior in greater or lesser amounts, but it doesn't determine behavior, personality, and so on" (Wood 1994, 20-21).

As you read this information on gender socialization, reflect on the experiences you explored in the first section of this chapter. Look closely at whether you were socialized and behaved according to traditional codes of gender to a more gender neutral code of behavior, or one that was oppositional to a traditional gender identification. As you observe your response to the data and theories discussed in this chapter, note whether you find your own beliefs challenged or reinforced by the material and determine whether there is any connection between your reactions and your own gender socialization.

#### Gender Theory

While biology and interpersonal dynamics clearly have an important impact on the development of gender identity, many theorists believe that culture is the most critical determinant. Three key elements contributing to gender development are described below.

*Biological* research has demonstrated that higher levels of the male hormone testosterone may predict more aggressive behavior. There is also research indicating that men may have greater development of the left side of the brain, which impacts linear thinking, while women seem to have greater development of the right side of the brain, which governs holistic and intuitive thinking. There is also some research indicating that women may have greater ability to cross from one



side of the brain to the other, thus blending linear and intuitive thinking (Wood 1994, 37).

Theories of *interpersonal* relationships and dynamics also explain elements of gender development. These theories focus on the impact that family dynamics and social learning have on personality development and gender identification. According to social learning theory, individuals learn to be masculine or feminine according to what they see and observe. In Chapter One we discussed social learning theory, which explained that if children mimic behavior they are told is appropriate to their gender and receive reinforcement, they are likely to repeat it (Wood 1994, 37).

Jean Piaget and Carol Gilligan are major contributors to cognitive development theories that contend that children play an active role in the development of their own gender identity. According to these theorists, by age five or six, children begin to see their gender definition as permanent and seek role models to pattern themselves after (Wood 1994, 44–45).

*Cultural* explanations of gender development include both interpersonal and biological theories and research. Anthropological studies suggest that

the more technologically complex and advanced a culture is, the more stratification it creates to divide people by gender, as well as by other factors such as race and class. With technological advancement comes competition, and this lays a foundation for inequality, since some people will have more than others of whatever is valued in a culture. One of the arrangements that capitalism encourages is a division between public and private realms of life and the placement of women in the private or domestic sphere. Because public life is considered more important, this arrangement fosters subordination of women. (Wood 1994, 47)

In other words, according to cultural explanations of gender, traits such as aggressiveness and nurturing exist in both boys and girls. It is the way the culture fosters and encourages the assignment of these characteristics to males or females that determines which characteristics are acceptable for each gender to cultivate. This reinforcement of traits assigned according to gender is the work of parents, peers, schools, and the media.

Cultural theories regarding gender development are often constructed in a political context and analyzed according to which gender wields more power. This political analysis conforms closely to the fabric of oppression as described in Chapter One. You may recall the definition of targeted groups as those with less access to resources, privileges, and power. In the United States, according to these definitions, men constitute the dominant group and women constitute the targeted group. This does not mean that all men have great power and wealth, nor does it mean that all women are powerless or impoverished. Rather, this theory addresses structural access to the factors that lead to success. U.S. culture tends to value traits that are considered traditionally masculine and that lead to the kind of success defined as economic wealth and professional status. This is often a less than visible cultural norm.

### *The Relative Status of Men and Women*

By 1997, the percentage of women working full time and earning wages had increased from 29 percent in 1967 to 41 percent. Until 1987, there was a trend for men to earn more real wages than their fathers. This has continued to be true for college-educated men, but the median income for all other groups of men actually fell. The real income for women increased during this time period because of the increase of the percentage of women working. But in 1998, despite this growth in employment and income for women, they continued to earn only 74 percent of what men earned (Weinberg 1998, 1).

While the education gap between men and women had closed significantly by 1993, the income gap had not. Women with high school diplomas made \$19,163 to men's \$26,820, and women with bachelor's degrees earned \$32,291 to men's \$45,987. Some of this wage gap was due to men and women being paid different amounts for the same work and some was due to the kinds of jobs that were considered gender specific for men or women. There were more female heads of household in 1993, a status that has become a strong predictor of poverty. Married couples with children had a poverty rate of 9 percent while female headed households with children had a poverty rate of 46 percent (U.S. Bureau of Census 1995).

Another indicator of authority and power is that of positions held in government and private industry. A record 55 women were members of the House of Representatives, and 9 women were senators in 1998. While these numbers represent all-time highs, it is sobering to note that there were 380 men in the House and 91 men in the Senate (Associated Press, May 4, 1998).

A 1996 analysis of Fortune 500 companies revealed that there were only two women who were chief executive officers (CEOs). When the analysis was expanded to include the top 1000 companies, the numbers increased to five women (Elliot 1997, 50).

In 1950, 28 percent of married women with children worked outside the home, and by 1986 this percentage increased to 68 percent. But despite this shift in labor, the "second shift" of work at home still fell largely to women. Arlie Hochschild has documented that housework and the work to care for children remain the domain of women and that, in fact, women work the equivalent of an extra month each year at home performing these domestic chores. "But for men, the situation differed in one fundamental way. By tradition, the second shift did not fall to them. In contrast to their wives, it was not a 'new idea' that they should work. In the eyes of the world, they felt judged by their capacity to support the family and earn status at work. They got little credit for helping at home" (Hochschild 1989, 200).

The AAUW has documented sharp differences in self-esteem and scores on standardized tests for boys and girls as they move through puberty and adolescence. "Large-scale empirical studies, public-opinion polls, and in-depth clinical studies following individual girls through school all report significant declines in girls' self-esteem and self-confidence as they move from childhood to early ado-



lescence. . . . A nationwide survey commissioned by the AAUW in 1990 found that on average 69 percent of elementary school boys and 60 percent of elementary school girls reported that they were 'happy the way I am'; among high school students the percentages were 46% for boys and only 29% for girls" (AAUW 1995, 19). While the study found that these percentages held steady for white middle class girls, they found interesting differences for African American girls and young Latinas. Girls of color demonstrated higher levels of personal self-esteem, yet significantly lower levels of self-esteem related to academics (AAUW 1995, 19-21).

The AAUW study documented the gender socialization process that begins with the use of the terms *boy* and *girl* as "simple labels rather than conceptual categories" (AAUW 1995, 17). By age four, children begin to see certain activities and toys as appropriate exclusively for girls or boys and by age five, sex roles seem to be more rigidly defined with clearly understood rules. There is evidence that by ages six and seven, boys and girls internalize these rules and are strongly inclined to play in sex-segregated groups. Yet eight to ten year olds continue to exhibit flexibility regarding sex stereotyped behavior and many girls move back and forth from the rules for boys' and girls' behavior (AAUW 1995, 17).

By early adolescence this flexibility begins to disappear in girls: "Early adolescence is a significant transition period of both sexes, but research reveals it to be a particularly difficult time for girls. Moving from 'young girl' to 'young woman' involves meeting unique demands in a culture that both idealizes and exploits the sexuality of young women while assigning them roles that are clearly less valued than male roles" (AAUW 1995, 18).

There have been some challenges, however, to the AAUW report. Other studies have observed the negative results of gender socialization in boys. Boys have a greater tendency to repeat a grade in school, to drop out of school, to be diagnosed with learning disabilities, to be placed in special education, and to be suspended or expelled from school. These reports do not necessarily contradict those of gender socialization and its consequences for girls. Rather, they point out that extreme gender socialization has different but often negative consequences for boys and girls (Lewin 1998, 3).

One final bit of information that provides another layer to the issue of self-esteem involves how women regard their appearance. I graduated from high school in 1967. There were at least ten girls in my graduating class who had had cosmetic surgery on their noses, what we referred to as "nose jobs." This was at least 5 percent of the females in my graduating class. These girls underwent surgery in which their noses were broken and reshaped. I remember visiting them in the hospital and shuddering from the enormously bruised eyes resulting from the break and the huge white bandage on the nose. These girls all began as attractive. Yet with the permission and encouragement of their parents, they were willing to undergo this ordeal to more closely match societal norms. In fact, from 1981 to 1984, women increased elective cosmetic surgery by 30 percent, changing their eyes

and noses, lifting their faces, and enlarging their breasts (Franck and Brownstone 1993). By 1997 plastic surgeons performed close to 2 million cosmetic procedures to reduce the size of noses, enlarge the size of breasts, and to suck the fat out of women's thighs. This figure was up 50 percent since 1992, and procedures such as breast augmentation and liposuction had more than tripled (Hamilton and Weingarden 1998, 14).

### *Gender and American History*

Think carefully about the people in American history you were taught were significant, the ones you were told made key contributions to the development of the United States. Who were they? My list, which comes from the mid to late 1960s, includes George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, John D. Rockefeller, John Smith, Teddy Roosevelt, and Franklin Roosevelt. The only women who I remember learning about as historical figures were minor players in the texts—a pre-Disney Pocahontas and Betsy Ross of American flag fame. Perhaps those of you who are younger have more women on your list, but by and large, our U.S. history books are the story of men's contributions, literally *his* story.

Consider the women described below and their contributions to American history. How many of them have you studied? How many even sound familiar to you? How do you think your perspective on American historical figures and history itself would have been different had you learned about these women?

In 1539, Francesca Hinesrosa was the first European woman to reach the New World alive (Rappaport 1990, 6). In 1634, Anne Hutchinson was the first American woman to challenge the unequal status of women. She defied the Puritan clergy and held meetings that ran against the rules and norms of society. These meetings, held in her home, were attended by men and women together to discuss religious and political ideas contrary to the dominant ones of the time. In 1683 Hutchinson was found guilty of religious and civil slander and improper behavior. As a result she was excommunicated and banished (Rappaport 1990, 37). It is not commonly known that many women who were brought to the American shores as indentured servants and slaves fought for their freedom. "In 1781, in an unusual act of defiance, Elizabeth Freeman protested her enslavement by going to court and argued that the Massachusetts Bill of Rights had ended slavery. She won her case and her freedom" (Rappaport 1990, 28). These are bits and pieces of American history rarely found in history textbooks.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, one impact of the Industrial Revolution was a dramatic change in the gender assignment of work and labor. Tasks that had previously belonged to women were taken over by factories. Ironically, as white middle class women became revered as mothers, wives, and "ladies," their position in the family became less productive and began to be regarded as inferior. "The world of business, trade, and government was seen as the right place for



men, whom society viewed as competitive, aggressive, and materialistic. Women were thought of as gentle, spiritual, and nurturing. The idea of a woman's sphere, separate and different from the man's sphere, was accepted as an eternal truth" (Rappaport 1990, 50). The woman's domestic sphere was not only separate but unequal as well.

Most high school history books address the development and consequences of the Industrial Revolution with little mention of how this phenomenon impacted the organization of labor inside and outside the home and how earning money became more highly valued. More importantly, there is rarely any mention of how the assignment of labor was done along gender lines—with the highly valued paid labor in the public sphere assigned to men and the unpaid and devalued home labor assigned to women.

The untold stories above are predominantly about white women, particularly white women of middle class and above. A story that is even more deeply hidden from accessible and common history is the story of women of color. While there are many stories of immigration, discrimination, and valor, the story of African American women is a quintessential American story rarely told in general American history books.

"Judged by the evolving nineteenth century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women's roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands, Black women were practically anomalies" (Davis 1981, 5). African women, brought to the United States as slaves, were first valued according to the amount of labor they could do. Contrary to myths established in such films as *Gone with the Wind*, seven out of eight black women were field workers rather than housekeepers or nursemaids (Davis 1981, 5).

One former slave described her situation:

We had ragged huts made out of poles, and some of the cracks chinked up with mud and moss, and some of them wasn't [weren't]. We didn't have no [any] good beds, just scaffolds nailed up to the wall out of poles and the old ragged bedding thrown [thrown] on them. That sure was hard sleeping, but even that felt good to our weary bones after them [those] long hard days' work in the field. I tended to the children when I was a little gal and tried to clean house jus[t] like Old Miss tells me to. Then as soon as I was ten years old, Old Master, he says, "Git [get] this here nigger to that cotton patch." (Watkins and David 1970, 16)

While motherhood was revered in white middle class society in the nineteenth century, after the abolition of the international slave trade black women were instead valued for their ability to reproduce as many offspring as possible to continue to "supply" free labor in the form of more slaves. Black women were therefore prized either as laborers or as "breeders," depending on which function they could perform best.

The central place that work occupies in contemporary black women's lives and the features of relationships between black women and men were established dur-

ing slavery. Because black women's labor was measured the same as that of black men, "the economic arrangements of slavery contradicted the hierarchical sexual roles incorporated in the new [post-Industrial Revolution] ideology. Male-female relations within the slave community could not, therefore, conform to the dominant ideological pattern" (Davis 1981, 18).

The tragic irony of slavery for women was that while post-Industrial Revolution white women's work was taken over by factories and their status thus reduced, black women were performing the same work as black men. In the limited domestic life of slaves, the work black women and men performed for themselves was characterized by equality. "Within the confines of their family and community life, therefore, Black people managed to accomplish a magnificent feat. They transformed the negative equality which emanated from the equal oppression they suffered as slaves into a positive quality: the egalitarianism characterizing their social relations" (Davis 1981, 18).

The Nat Turner rebellion against slavery in 1831 marked the beginning of the abolitionist movement. At the same time strikes in the textile factories by working class white women in the northeast began, and groups of wealthier white women began fighting for the right to education and careers outside the home. These women used the language of "slavery" to describe their oppression in factories and in marriage, and while the comparison was often exaggerated, the stage was set for the affinity of the first phase of the women's movement and the antislavery movement.

Some of these women began to engage in acts of courage and heroism, important elements of history that are rarely documented in our common education. For example, in 1833 Prudence Crandall, a white teacher in Canterbury, Connecticut, accepted a black girl into her school. She remained steadfast as the parents of the white girls boycotted the school. She ultimately recruited more black girls and eventually operated an all-black school in defiance of the white people of the town (Davis 1981, 34–35).

Sarah and Angelina Grimké were white women born in South Carolina to a slave-holding family. They moved to the North and became outspoken abolitionists and the first to explicitly link women's rights to black rights. "More than any other women in the campaign against slavery, the Grimkés urged the constant inclusion of the issue of women's rights. At the same time they argued that women could never achieve their freedom independently of Black people" (Davis 1981, 44).

While Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech has attained some recognition and acclaim, few people are aware of this ex-slave's contribution to the fight for freedom of women and slaves. She had to struggle simply for the right to speak at women's conventions and said, "I know that it feels a kind of hissing and ticking like to see a colored woman get up and tell you about things and Woman's Rights. We have all been thrown down so low that nobody thought we'd ever get up again, but we have been long enough trodden now, we will come up again, and now I am here." (Davis 1981, 59).

"Meanwhile, large numbers of Black women were manifesting their commit-



ment to freedom and equality in ways that were less closely connected with the newly organized women's movement" (Davis 1981, 64). African American women from the North were prominent in the Underground Railroad and took enormous risks to illegally transport slaves to freedom. This work was separate from the newly organized women's movement. There was Jane Lewis from Ohio, who rescued slaves through hundreds of crossings of the Ohio River. There was Frances E. W. Harper, a poet and antislavery lecturer, and there was Charlotte Forten, an important black educator and abolitionist. There was Sarah Remond, who brought her antislavery lectures to England and helped dissuade the British from intervening on the side of the Confederacy (Davis 1981, 64).

The Grinkés, Crandall, Sojourner Truth, Lewis, Harper, Forten, and Remond are just a few examples of courageous women, white and black, who took strong antiracist steps to change their own lives and to contribute to changing history. The omission of their stories and historical significance frames what we think of as important historical information and what we think of as tangential or trivial.

The women you have just read about made enormous contributions and changes in history, yet they are rarely mentioned in American history. This gap in important information contributes to how boys and girls construct the meaning of the importance of each gender. These voids in the story of America have a subtle, but enormous, impact on how boys and girls see themselves in the context of history as well as their own relative value.

### *The Women's Movement and Feminism*

She is dissatisfied with a lot that women of other hands can only dream of. Her discontent is deep, pervasive, and impervious to the superficial remedies which are offered at every hand. . . . From the beginning of time, the female cycle has defined and confined woman's role. As Freud was credited with saying: "Anatomy is destiny." Though no group of women has ever pushed these natural restrictions as far as the American wife, it seems that she still cannot accept them with good grace. A young mother with a beautiful family, charm, talent and brains is apt to dismiss her role apologetically, "What do I do?" you hear her say. "Why nothing; I'm just a housewife." (*Newsweek* 1960, 57-60)

There are several interesting elements embedded in this 1960 quote from a *Newsweek* magazine article titled "Young Wives." The first, and most obvious, is that women are identified, even in the title, in their relationship to their husbands. They are young wives, not young women. A second embedded belief is that a woman's menstrual cycle and her body dictate the kind of person she is to be and the work she is destined to perform. The third is the scorn with which the dissatisfaction of middle class women is treated, as if to say, "How dare they be unhappy and apologetic when they have so much?" The fourth, and perhaps most subtle, is the acceptance of the "natural restrictions" imposed upon women's lives and the

implication that women who reject these restrictions are by extension "unnatural." Forty years later, most of us would find this analysis of women silly or even outrageous. However, it is important to recognize that these statements, which now seem painfully outdated, were regarded by and large as "truth" in the 1950s and 1960s. Women and men who were raised in this time period internalized these "facts" about gender. Part of the process of reconstructing knowledge is to lift these "truths" to a conscious level and analyze them. What are the invisible "truths" about gender that we hold onto today?

It was in 1963 that Betty Friedan first published *The Feminine Mystique*, which began the public challenge to these "natural restrictions" (Friedan 1963). The feminine mystique is the belief that middle class women with cars and garages, dishwashers and garbage disposals, children and car pools, husbands and products that got the ring out of the collar should be pleased with their lives. Dissatisfied women knew that either something was wrong with them as individuals or that their lives and marriages were not living up to a well-known and well-accepted ideal. During this time period, there was little thinking that perhaps this ideal was a myth. Until the 1950s and 1960s, few women discussed their sense of dissatisfaction. Many believed their unhappiness to be an individual problem or failure rather than a collective or political issue. It was in the late 1950s that women began to communicate with each other about the problem with no name, the dissatisfaction, the lack of fulfillment, the emptiness, the invisibility, the sense of no identity independent of their husbands or children.

In some ways, the 1950s repeated societal conditions that were similar to those during the period following the Industrial Revolution. New technology meant less housework for middle class women and more pressure to be the constantly available wife and mom. The division between the private and public spheres, female and male, became increasingly sharp. Women were told that being a wife and mother should be all they needed for fulfillment. And for those who were not filled up by those roles there was often anguish and guilt. By 1962 the plight of the trapped housewife was a popular topic in articles and conversation.

Again, middle class women found their way to political organization, this time in the form of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these women were organizing behind the scenes and marching in the streets in these struggles for justice for other groups.

During the 1960s, as the women's movement began to form, some women organized consciousness raising (CR) groups in which they began speaking to each other about issues such as the shortage of good quality options for child care, about rape and incest, body image, about the need for greater access to choices in education and work, and abortion. CR groups differed from therapy sessions in that while part of their intent and outcome was therapeutic, they were organized primarily so that women could begin to understand the collective and political nature of their problems. The CR groups were not led by professionals. Rather, women in the groups shared leadership, avoiding the kind of permanent hierarchy



that they believed had elevated men and damaged women. When the topic for a CR session was child care and individual women spoke of their inability to work or go to school because of few good choices for their children, it became increasingly clear that this was a collective problem, not an individual one, and women began to organize for legislation and increased funding for quality day care centers.

It was from this perspective that a central slogan of the women's movement emerged: "The personal is political." This meant that while women were programmed to keep their problems to themselves because they were private and individual, the more they spoke to each other, the more they realized that what had been contained in the woman-occupied private sphere was neither neutral, natural, nor apolitical (Shreve 1989).

Parallel to the development of CR groups and the embryonic women's movement was women's involvement in the burgeoning student group Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). SDS was participating in sit-ins for the rights of black people in the south and organizing demonstrations to protest the Vietnam War. While women were in the thick of this planning and these activities, it was men who occupied the formal leadership positions. And when women demanded that issues of day care and rape awareness and assistance be made a part of the SDS platform, once again they were scorned. Yet this time the scorn did not emanate from the middle class establishment or sources like *Newsweek*, but rather from the political left that was trying to create a more just world.

Women's participation in the consciousness raising movement, the civil rights movement, the New Left, and the emerging counterculture provided them with important lessons that translated to the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. These lessons included nontraditional political experiences, radical ideas about the individual and society, alternative institutions, and an awareness of the discrepancies between egalitarian ideals and sexist practices. While there were racial and liberal branches of the women's movement that wanted society restructured in different ways, the essential feminist ideals were the importance of equality and equity and the need to change the quality and the economics of human relationships and institutions.

Yet, by the late 1970s through the present, feminism was often regarded as a dirty word conjuring images of strident male-haters and often derided as led by unattractive hairy-legged women unable to attract men. How did this revision and distortion happen? The news media often reported on the women's movement's work to change the norms of social interaction with derision and negativity. For example, women who were part of a guerrilla theater protest at a 1960s Miss America pageant burned artifacts to symbolize how beauty and cosmetics served as instruments of women's oppression. This event was reported not as the symbolic protest it was, but rather as women scandalously burning their bras. As late as 1970, West Virginia Senator Jennings Randolph was quoted by ABC's Howard K. Smith as referring to the women's movement as "a small band of bra-less bubbleheads" (Douglas 1994, 163).

Table 2.1

## The Roles of Men and Women in Education

	Teachers		Principals/Presidents	
	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female
Elementary schools	14	86	82	18
Junior high schools	39	61	97	3
High schools	53	47	98	2
Colleges	93	7	90	10

Source: Julia Wood, *Gendered Lives*, 1994.

The news media also regularly reported that the women's movement was about women opening their own car doors, lighting their own cigarettes, and paying for themselves on dates. The shift in these norms of interaction between men and women was certainly an important element of feminism. But what went largely unreported was the women's movement focus on the fundamental issues of equality in relationships, pay equity, child care, a wider array of choices for women, and women's rights to make decisions about their bodies (Faludi 1991).

*Education—What You Know and How You Know It*

The snapshots of missing history described above tell us what content was typically missing from our common American history. They tell us of women who made important contributions in their lives, careers, and their work for equality. This information is a small portion of the story of American women, but it begins to paint a picture of the partial nature of what children learn and do not learn in the formative years of their lives. While the specific content of early history books may not always stick in the minds of young children, the subtle message about the relative importance of men and the relative unimportance of women becomes an essential element of what Peggy Orenstein calls the "hidden curriculum" (Orenstein 1994, 5) and what Julia T. Wood calls "gendered education" (Wood 1994, 206).

Young girls are often boisterously androgynous, barreling through their lives with enthusiasm and little regard for sexual stereotyping. Yet something dramatic happens in early adolescence, including the dropping of IQ scores and the plummeting of math and science grades (AAUW 1995). Simone de Beauvoir says that part of what happens to teenage girls is that they realize that men have power and that the largest part of their power as girls comes from agreeing to be submissive adored objects. "All girls, from the most servile to the haughtiest, learn in time that to please they must abdicate" (McPhee and Fitzgerald 1979).



Schools are powerful agents of socialization, a central source of learning about gender identity. The organization of education, the information that is taught, and the roles that adult males and females play in schools convey a sense of standards to children about what is normal and who holds power. The lower status of women is reflected in school structures in which the majority of people in positions of power are men, while teachers and staff are largely women. At the higher levels of education where the status and compensation increase, the numbers of women in teaching positions decrease (see Table 2.1). This limits the kind of role models available for both boys and girls and becomes a part of the hidden curriculum in which there are many ways to tell students which sex is more important in the world.

From elementary school on, the explicit curriculum continues to reinforce the image of men as more important than women. A 1990 study documented pervasive gender stereotypes in elementary school reading primers. They found that while the numbers of male and female characters in primer stories had evened out, that males were still represented in two-thirds of the pictures and photographs. In addition, the study demonstrated that the male characters were more likely to be depicted as adventurous risk-takers, while the female characters were portrayed as more dependent on males for help (Purcell and Stewart 1990, 177–185).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, history books also chronicle primarily male involvement in discoveries, politics, inventions, war, and social change. “Women virtually disappear in historical accounts of our country and the world . . . when education makes women invisible and distorts their experiences by using male standards, social life as a whole is distorted” (Wood 1994, 212).

The AAUW study documented that girls are less likely to reach their full academic potential than boys. AAUW observations of even the most well-meaning teachers indicated that they were more likely to recognize and affirm the participation of boys than of girls. Some of the teacher attitudes documented in the study reflected praise and reinforcement for quiet girls while allowing and encouraging more boisterous and aggressive behavior for boys. Schools, in fact, often contribute to the socialization of boys and girls into traditional gender roles by encouraging boys to be competitive and assertive and girls to build relationships and be nurturing (AAUW 1995). “People who have learned to use communication to build relationships and collaborate with others find it uncomfortable to compete, to assert themselves over others and to speak in absolute terms that don’t invite others to participate. This may explain why many women students in coeducational institutions speak up less often in the classrooms” (Wood 1994, 220).

This educational socialization of boys and girls does not end when they complete high school but continues into higher education. Another study indicated that verbal and nonverbal practices by college and university teachers provide more recognition to males than females. Faculty members are more likely to know male students’ names, ask more challenging questions of males, and call on male students more often. According to the study, female students’ responses are dismissed more often than those of males (Wood, 1994, 232).

So far, we have considered the gendered content of education and the gendered information we receive through the organization of education and teacher behavior. But, have you ever thought about *how* you know things? How do you *know* or how did you learn who Christopher Columbus was? How do you *know* what it means to be polite, kind, or courteous? How do you *know* whom to believe when different people give you conflicting information or perspectives? It is not just what we learn but how we learn it and the way we express it that has relative value. “Nowhere is the pattern of using male experience to define the human experience seen more clearly than in models of intellectual development. The mental processes that are involved in considering the abstract and the impersonal have been labeled ‘thinking’ and are attributed primarily to men, while those that deal with the personal and interpersonal fall under the rubric of ‘emotions’ and are largely relegated to women” (Field Belenky et al. 1988, 7).

A 1986 study interviewed 135 women, documenting distinct ways in which people learn or “know” things. The study found that while there was some gender overlap, particularly in the way that formally educated men and women know things, overall there were distinct patterns of learning that fell along gender lines. According to this study, the kind of knowledge that is most revered in education is received knowledge, which comes primarily from outside sources or authorities. This kind of knowing is largely the domain of men who have been socialized to believe this is the proper or only way to learn as well as women who have learned that received knowledge is the way to successfully navigate academia. Those men and women who succeed academically have *mastered* (a gendered word, you may notice) the ability to take in and analyze received knowledge. Subjective knowledge, which values personal and internal sources of information, is often regarded as soft and invalid in the academy. Yet, as we have learned, many women are socialized to learn about personal relationships and life experiences in this way (Field Belenky et al. 1988, 54). The authors of the study propose a third way of knowing, constructed knowledge, which allows for the blend of information that comes from both inside and outside the self, recognizing both as valid authorities (Field Belenky et al. 1988, 119).

When education is modeled predominantly along the lines of received knowledge, all authority exists outside the self. Paulo Freire refers to this kind of teaching as the banking model, in which the teacher fills the student by making deposits of information and the student regularly returns the same deposits to the teacher (Freire 1989). When models of learning are used that are predominantly male, both boys and girls receive messages about which kind of knowing is superior. If boys and girls are successfully socialized to believe that internal knowledge is inferior, they may be unnecessarily and destructively cut off from an important source of information—themselves.

“To see that all knowledge is a construction and that truth is a matter of the context in which it is embedded is to greatly expand the possibilities of how to think about anything, even those things we consider to be the most elementary and



obvious” (Field Belenky et al. 1988, 138). When we learn about our history and our place in it as men and women, when we learn about what it means to be feminine or masculine, we are only receiving knowledge. We are relying on other authorities—parents, school, or the culture at large—to tell us who we are and what we should think. In order to transcend and expand a one-way receipt of knowledge, it is essential to understand that all knowledge and information is limited by perspective, context, experience, and time. As you read this book, it is important to recognize that even as the author or expert in the field, I cannot tell you what I do not know, have not been told, have not learned, have not experienced, or do not see.

### *Gender, Oppression, and Liberation*

Looking back to Chapter One, you will recall that social groups are groups of people who share a common social identity such as gender. Social power accrues to those social groups who have greater access to resources that increase the chances of getting what one wants and influencing others. Oppression is the structural arrangement by which resources, privilege, and power are allocated in such a way that some social groups have more access to these and some have less. As what we know about gender and how we know it is carefully analyzed, it becomes increasingly clear that women as a social group have significantly less social power than men.

It is important to reiterate that women can be targeted by oppression without consciously ever experiencing a hateful act. As you review who holds the seats of power in the public and private sectors, you will see that the vast majority of these positions are held by men and that women have less access to power. As you ponder the post-Industrial Revolution division of labor into public and private spheres, with women assigned primarily to the lower status of the private sphere, you can see that women have less access to privileges and resources. As you contemplate what happens in schools and how I.Q. points for girls drop in early adolescence, you can see that women and men are socialized to take certain assigned places in society.

Remember again the definition of hegemony, the process by which those in power secure the consent or social submission of those who are not in power. Hegemony is secured not through force, but rather through the way that values are taught in religious, educational, and media institutions; in other words—through socialization. Remember the story of the little girl, Jennifer, who learned that to be feminine meant pink and ruffles and makeup and jewelry, and that admiration from boys and girls and parents and grandparents for prettiness and sweetness was the core of what was important. Jennifer was socialized in a particular way, not representative of all women, but rather a sharp and dramatic symbol of the impact of socialization. Jennifer may experience a good life, but hegemony has established a limit to her choices. Given what she has learned so well, she is unlikely to choose to be a corporate executive or a chemical engineer.

Understanding how oppression and hegemony operate with regard to gender is

not fatalistic, nor does it carry a predictable life sentence. Rather, it describes the obstacles to making independent choices and the structural barriers to power, privileges, and resources. Certainly, there are women engineers and attorneys, doctors and corporate executives who have found a way to resist complete gender socialization. Understanding oppression is understanding the big picture; it does not explain everyone’s individual story.

For women to have greater access to the power and the resources to get what they want in life does not necessitate that every woman aggressively seek positions of great stature and power. Rather, what is needed is for women and men to have information about:

- women’s role in history;
- the disparity in income and employment;
- the way that socialization happens;
- the role that parents and the educational system play in grooming girls to be women and boys to be men; and
- an understanding of how different ways of knowing are assigned with higher status to men and lower status to women.

What is needed is not to dictate and prescribe what one must do to be masculine and feminine, but rather an understanding of the role that individuals and groups have played and can play in order to offer girls and boys, women and men a wider array of choices for their lives.

Liberation theory, as applied to gender, presumes that women and men have infinite capacities to be successful, and yet boys and girls are bombarded from birth with messages and misinformation about what it means to be male and what it means to be female. As young boys and girls, we learn these lessons well. Yet liberation theory maintains that the possibility of reaching full potential is innate, while misinformation that is oppressive is learned. Therefore, all of the misinformation about status and femininity and position that is oppressive can be unlearned. Liberation is the group and individual process by which people and institutions can observe, recognize, rethink, and interrupt the negative messages and change how we see ourselves and others.

### **Gender and Entertainment Media**

This next section will guide you as you begin to connect the dots between what you learned through your personal experience, through your formal education, and the messages received through entertainment media. Your challenge is to evaluate and integrate new information on gender and reevaluate what you have learned to be true in the past. It will be important to determine whether the messages about gender in entertainment media challenge or reinforce what you have been taught in school and in your life.



Entertainment media is a central source of gender socialization. Consider these differences in the way that men and women are portrayed in television and film:

- Women are portrayed in all media as being primarily involved in relationships and men are more often portrayed in the context of their careers.
- Women are portrayed in both television and film as seeking romance 35 percent of the time, while men are portrayed seeking romance only 20 percent of the time.
- Women's appearance is more than twice as likely to elicit comments in television and film than men's appearance.
- Women are shown to groom or preen three times more than men in television and film.
- Across all media, 46 percent of women are portrayed as thin as compared to 16 percent of men (Media Awareness 1997).

There are several key questions to consider as we analyze media images and their impact on our understanding of gender:

- What images of men and women do prime time television, feature films, and popular music convey?
- How does media ownership and production impact the images of men and women that we see and hear in these popular media forms?
- What are the underlying messages and ideologies about gender that are represented in the various forms of entertainment media?
- Do the images, ownership, messages, and ideology contribute to the standard socialization of men and women or do they challenge this status quo?

These questions will be analyzed in several different ways including the use of simple content analysis to examine characters and themes, a review of research and analysis about gender in popular media forms as well as media ownership and gender, and finally, an analysis of the particular and overall messages and ideology about gender in entertainment media. Content analysis, message system analysis, media literacy, and cultural studies will all be employed to examine these questions.

As you analyze fictional characters and themes in popular film, music, and television, it is critical to keep in mind a fundamental concept about *stereotypes*: A stereotype organizes information in such a way that it signals repetitive and often negative images based on an individual's membership in a particular group. As you recall, stereotypes are reinforced in entertainment media by maintaining simplicity. The simpler the character or theme, the more likely it is to be stereotyped. The more complex the character or theme, the less likely stereotyping is to occur and the more likely is the emergence of richness and complexity that defy easy categorization.

### Prime Time Television

#### Content Analysis

It is your turn to conduct a content analysis that will assess gender images on prime time television when you were a child. Think of yourself from age four to age twelve. Imagine what you did when you got up in the morning, when you came home from school, and during and after dinner. How much television did you watch in the average day? Did you watch television during meals? Record the approximate number of hours of television you watched weekly and note where and when you watched it. Next think hard and make a list of your ten favorite television programs during the eight years from four to twelve. You can list cartoons, dramas, comedies, children's programs, and adult programs that are designed to entertain. For the purposes of this exercise, list only programs that have a cohesive narrative and are not variety shows. This rules out programs such as *Sesame Street*, *MTV*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *Entertainment Tonight*. As you make your list, think of all of the programs that you begged your parents to let you watch during dinner or to allow you to stay up past your bedtime to watch. Remember those programs (do *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* or *Saved by the Bell* ring any particular bells for you?) that you loved to watch, discuss with your friends, and even act out when you were hanging out with your friends. When you finish your list, conduct the content analysis outlined in Media Activity 2.1.

After you have completed the questions in the activity, answer the following questions:

- What were the total numbers of males and females in starring roles in the programs you watched as a child?
- Were men or women more numerous in their employment outside of the home?
- Were men or women more likely to work at home or be a homemaker?
- Of those who were employed, were men or women more numerous in lower and higher paid positions?
- Were men or women more likely to be victims or heroes?
- Were men or women more likely to be beautiful, fit, and thin?
- Were men or women more responsible for taking care of children?
- Do you observe any patterns by gender in these characteristics and roles?
- Are there some roles in which men are in the clear majority? What are they?
- Are there some in which women are in the clear majority? Which characteristics and roles are those?
- What do these numbers signal about who is important in U.S. culture?

To get a larger sample, you can do this exercise with a group or class, ensuring that each program is only listed or analyzed one time.



**Media Activity 2.1**  
**Men and Women's Roles in Prime Time Television**

*Instructions*

List the television programs that were your favorite as a child. These programs should all be narrative fiction and not news, variety shows (such as *Sesame Street*), infotainment, movies, or specials. Then answer the following questions.

1. Determine how many men and how many women in each program had starring roles. Starring roles are those for which you can bank on the actors making the biggest salaries of the cast. If a character is on the program regularly but only featured occasionally as a major character, do not count him or her. Now total the numbers of men and women in starring roles in all of the programs you listed.
  - a. Total number of male characters in starring roles \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Total number of female characters in starring roles \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Total number of all characters in starring roles \_\_\_\_\_
2. Take a closer look at the list of men and women in starring roles and note, by gender, how many of them played the following roles in the programs:
 

	men	women
a. homemakers	_____	_____
b. worked outside home	_____	_____

(cont'd)

As you think through the patterns that emerge through this crude content analysis, begin to think about what kind of information is conveyed about the appropriate roles, work, and appearance for men and women. Are they about the same, slightly different, or significantly different for each sex? If you watched a minimum of ten hours of television per week as a child, the messages about gender that were conveyed from the programs you watched had an impact on you. What did you learn about being a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, from the entertainment television you watched?

Popular television has an enormous impact on children and teenagers. These programs play a key role in shaping a sense of self, gender identification and roles, and beliefs about what we can do as well as what we want to be and do as both children and adults. The roles and characteristics of men and women on television signal a sense of norms to the audience and can either confirm or challenge what we learn about gender roles and identification at home, in school, and from our peers. In fact, studies by George Gerbner, among others, have indicated that people who watch fifteen hours or more of television weekly tend to believe

- |   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| c. professionals                          | _____ | _____ |
| d. secretaries/clerical workers           | _____ | _____ |
| e. law enforcement                        | _____ | _____ |
| f. doctors                                | _____ | _____ |
| g. victims/martyrs                        | _____ | _____ |
| h. heroes                                 | _____ | _____ |
| i. took major responsibility for children | _____ | _____ |

Totals  
 (add the column for men for one total and the column for women for a second total)

3. Look at the starring roles by gender once again and add up the totals of males and females that exhibited the characteristics of appearance as follows:
 

	men	women
a. average in appearance	_____	_____
b. attractive in appearance	_____	_____
c. glamorous in appearance	_____	_____
d. thin in size	_____	_____
e. average in size	_____	_____
f. overweight	_____	_____
g. physically fit	_____	_____
h. voluptuous or sexy body	_____	_____

Totals

the "TV reality" over their own experience and observations in the world (Gerbner 1997, 1).

From 1965 to 1985, the percentage of male characters on prime time television was 71 percent and that of female characters was 29 percent. While more women were portrayed as workers by the 1990s, overall women were still under-represented, held lower status, and were chiefly focused on domestic issues (Elasmaret al. 1999, 21–26).

Sally Steenland examined eighty television entertainment programs during the spring 1990 season and found the following:

- most men and women were portrayed in their twenties and thirties; women's age drops off at forty, men's age drops off at fifty;
- the most common job for women on television was clerical;
- the most common job for men was law enforcement;
- the number of full-time female homemakers on television had increased;
- almost twice as many men as women were portrayed in the workplace;



- women of color were largely segregated to situation comedies; and
- as a rule men wore more clothes and kept them on longer than women (Steenland 1995, 180–187).

Despite Steenland's findings that the most common job on television for women was clerical, she also determined that television characters, including women, were likely to have more money than their real-life counterparts. Advertisers are seeking attractive surroundings for their thirty-second commercials. They want programs featuring affluent characters who can afford to buy their products.

Approximately 50 percent of the U.S. population are women, but only one-third of all characters on prime time television are women. In children's programming, only 18 percent of all characters are women (Gerbner 1997, 1).

In this section, we have used content analysis to examine gender roles in prime time television. Another method of analyzing gender in television is by recording and observing the number of interactions between characters according to gender. Media Activity 2.2 provides a method for tabulating and evaluating these interactions.

Which interactions occur the most frequently and which occur least frequently? If you are skeptical about your results, try another ten scenes from another program or get together with others who are tallying the same kinds of interactions from different programs. If there are sizable differences in who interacts with whom, it conveys still another set of messages about gender. This analysis goes beyond the assessment of characters and their roles, jobs, and personalities. Most of these analyses indicate that interactions between men and women are the most frequent, that those between men occur second in frequency, and that interactions between women are by far the least frequent. This signals to the audience a ranking of gender importance in conversation.

In her 1990 study, Steenland found that

It's the norm for men to talk more, give orders, solve problems, and run things. Society's bias is so commonplace that it seems normal. Even though few of us notice the gender imbalance in TV programs, an imprint is made. Girls grow up with fewer role models. Their choices are smaller (Steenland 1995, 187).

### Television as a Tool of Culture

Television interacts with gender in two critical ways. It reflects cultural values and it serves as a trusted conveyor of information and images (Wood 1994, 231). A 1986 study determined that children who watch television had more stereotyped views of the sexes than children who did not (Kimball 1986, 265–301).

Prime time television provides girls and women with a series of mixed and confusing messages:

American women today are a bundle of contradictions because much of the media imagery we grew up with was itself filled with mixed messages about what

### Media Activity 2.2 Interactions in Prime Time Television by Gender

#### Instructions

Choose a contemporary television program that is narrative fiction, either comedy or drama. You will need to record this program in order to view it several times. Select ten scenes from the program you choose. These scenes can be consecutive or at random. For the purpose of this analysis, a scene is defined as the time frame and dialogue in which the same characters are in the same physical space. Any time a character enters or departs or the physical setting changes, it constitutes another scene. Determine the number of conversational interactions there are in each scene between men and men, men and women, and women and women. Using the chart below, total these raw scores and determine their percentage of the total.

	% of interactions	% of total interactions
male/male interactions	_____	_____
female/female interactions	_____	_____
female/male interactions	_____	_____
Total interactions	_____	100%

Source: Gerbner (1997).

women should and should not do, what women could and could not be. This was true in the 1960s, and it is true today. The media, of course, urges us to be pliant, cute, sexually available, thin, blond, poreless, wrinkle-free and deferential to men. But it is easy to forget that the media also suggested we could be rebellious, tough, enterprising and shrewd. (Douglas 1994, 9)

The 1951 debut of *I Love Lucy* (1951–57) featured a woman who although dizzy and troublesome was the central character of the program. Producers tried to emulate this success with other programs such as *I Married Joan* (1952–55) and *My Little Margie* (1952), but few of the copies were successful. The early 1950s to the mid 1960s were filled with situation comedies in which women were housewives and played the support role and men were the workers and often the problem solvers. Programs such as *Father Knows Best* (1954–63), *Leave It to Beaver*



(1957–63), and the *Donna Reed Show* (1958–66) represent this genre. This television depiction was a good match for what was happening in post–World War II U.S. culture. After the war, women were largely taken out of the job market and remained at home while their husbands went back to work. Women's role as homemaker became central to the postwar economy and the ongoing division of the public and private spheres (Lout 1995, 169).

Despite the rigid gender roles on prime time programs, even the 1950s offered choices, complexities, and ambiguities for women. Douglas examines the interplay of prime time television with news coverage in the 1950s and 1960s. Along with *Leave It to Beaver*, there was the news coverage of the civil rights movement, the Nixon–Kennedy debates, and rocket launches. Girls got the impression that to be an American was to be tough, individualistic, brave, and smart, while to be a girl was to be nurturing and passive (Douglas 1994, 26). Since girls were both female and American, this meant some confusing choices amid the contradictions. I can remember a dilemma of this sort when I was about thirteen years old. My family had a pool table in the basement and I became quite proficient at pool. My friends would come over on the weekends and I could clobber most of the boys in pool. But my teen magazines warned me to never beat a boy at a game because it was not feminine and because their egos could not take it.

By the 1970s there was an increase in programs that centered around female characters. There were working women depicted on shows ranging from *Mary Tyler Moore* (1970–77) to *Rhoda* (1974–81) to *Charlie's Angels* (1976–81). By the mid-1970s, beautiful women cops emerged in *Police Woman* (1974–78) and *Get Christie Love* (1974–75). By the mid-1970s to early 1980s, more roles for black women emerged in *Good Times* (1974–79) and *What's Happening* (1976–78). Yet in each of these shows the central black women, Florida and Shirley, respectively, played the role of the good-natured “mummy” (Lout 1995).

Although the 1970s featured more women characters in prime time television, studies also revealed that there were more males in evening television than females, more diverse roles were available to males, and female characters appeared less competent than male characters. From 1972 to 1981 only 44 percent of female prime time characters worked outside the home as compared to over 60 percent of women in reality (Steenland 1990).

The CBS series *Cagney and Lacey* (1982–88) broke some of these tried and true portrayals and omissions of women characters on television. This story of two female police officers who solved their own cases without relying on men was the first TV drama to star two women. In the series, Christine Cagney was single with an active sex life, and Mary Beth Lacey was the primary breadwinner of her family and often shown as the partner to initiate sex with her husband. *Cagney and Lacey* was first made as a TV movie; it received high ratings and moved on to become a series starring Meg Foster as Cagney and Tyne Daley as Lacey. After a few episodes, CBS said the women were too tough and aggressive, “too women’s lib,” and said they would only continue the series if Foster

were replaced. Meg Foster was subsequently replaced by Sharon Gless (D’Acci 1995, 454–459).

“The quest for the working women’s market in the late 1970s and 1980s led to women oriented programs and feminist subject matter in prime time. But as we have seen, when these representations deviated too much from the acceptable conventions of the industry, they were quickly brought back in line” (D’Acci 1995, 465). Because so many women viewers hungered for alternative female images, they persisted in using oppositional viewing modes in order to identify with Cagney and Lacey as nontraditional women despite the changes to soften the characters and make them more traditionally feminine (D’Acci 1995, 460).

A new image in the 1980s was women as “superwomen.” Women who held professional jobs, were raising families, had fun at home, and resolved problems gracefully within thirty to sixty minutes were seen on *Family Ties* (1982–89) and *The Cosby Show* (1984–92). There were also increasingly diverse roles available for women in such 1980s programs as *Murder She Wrote* (1984–96), *Frank’s Place* (1987–88), *Cheers* (1982–93), and *Murphy Brown* (1988–98). “Prior to the late 1980s, men were more likely to interact with other men, whereas women were more likely to interact with men, thus reinforcing the ideas that women compete with one another and prefer to be with men. In the mid-1980s groups of women were shown as friends and family to one another in such programs as *Designing Women* [1986–93] and *Golden Girls* [1985–92]” (Lout 1995, 171).

Another 1980s television phenomenon was the meteoric rise of the single dad as character in programs such as *Full House* (1987–95), *My Two Dads* (1987–90), and *Who’s the Boss?* (1984–93). While in the real world the vast majority of single parents were and continue to be women, in TV land single parents were predominantly men.

The 1990s offered a wider array of female characters in continuing programs such as *Murphy Brown* and newer programs such as *Roseanne* (1988–97) and *Northern Exposure* (1990–95). But these less traditional female characters continued to be more the exception than the rule (Lout 1995, 171).

Soap operas are still another television genre that offers a unique perspective on gender. Evening soaps, in particular, often present strong female characters and address issues from a point of view that is sympathetic to women. For example, evening soaps present an unusually high number of middle aged women and women with access to great power. The characters of Alexis and Angelica from *Dynasty* (1981–89) and *Dallas* (1978–91) represent unusual television examples of the successful, independent career woman (Geraghty 1991, 43).

According to British author Christine Geraghty, the structure and characterization in soap operas offers an oppositional point of view with regard to gender. In the first place, daytime soaps are slow paced in the development of action, which Geraghty maintains reflects the drudgery in the lives of housewives. In the second place, these daytime soaps present women characters as the glue that holds the family together (Geraghty 1991, 43).



Perhaps most importantly, Geraghty provides an analysis of soap operas that reinforces the feminist notion that the personal is political: "Soaps overturn a deeply entrenched value structure which is based on the traditional opposition of masculinity and femininity. . . . Instead, the essence of soaps is the reflection on personal problems and the emphasis is on talk not on action, on slow development rather than the immediate response, on delayed retribution rather than instant effect" (Geraghty 1991, 41). The action in soap operas is strongly rooted in the personal sphere of life.

### *Prime Time Television—Employment and Economics*

Sally Steenhand's 1990 study also revealed the gender gap in employment in prime time television production. In 1990, only 15 percent of all producers were women, 25 percent of all writers were women, and 9 percent of directors were women. In addition, two-thirds of entertainment network executives at the vice president level and above were men.

The conglomerate ownership of media described in Chapter One and the prevalence of males in charge in entertainment media tend to proscribe and limit the roles and personality traits of women characters on television. As emphasized by Ben Bagdikian in *The Media Monopoly*, this does not indicate a conspiracy or a plot. Rather, the level of wealth, ownership, and experience of the individuals who own and run entertainment television results in a high degree of shared values, which are conveyed in programming (Bagdikian 1992, 16). If men dominate the writing, production, and direction of prime time television, it is likely that their collective life experiences and world view will be reflected.

As it emerged in the 1960s, feminism was and continues to be a concept that challenges the conventional place of women by criticizing and proposing to change traditional roles in order to allow women a wider array of life choices. Feminism invites women to question the narrowly defined, exclusive, and prescribed roles as homemaker and primary nurturer, as secretary and waitress, as nurse and teacher. Feminism does not criticize the value of these jobs and roles, but rather raises questions about why they offer such low pay and low status and are occupied predominantly by women. Feminism also asks women to consider what they put on and do to their faces and bodies to conform to an image of beauty that is almost universally inaccessible.

"One of the reasons why television is resistant to the messages of feminism, then, is that they [sponsors] view those messages as conflicting with women's desire to consume. Women buy products, it is thought, to please their families and to make themselves more attractive. Feminism, which argues that women should not base their self-image on the approval of others, inhibits women's desire to consume" (Dow 1995, 200). It is critical to remember that in addition to its explicit function to entertain and what we have discovered to be its implicit function to socialize, entertainment television is a vehicle for advertising. It would not be in

### Media Activity 2.3 Gender Ideology in Prime Time Television

#### *Instructions*

Select three prime time television programs that are narrative fiction and family-based. These programs can be from the past and/or present (e.g., *Leave It to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, *Silver Spoon*, *The Simpsons*, *Roseanne*, *The Cosby Show*, *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Home Improvement*). Write the names of the male and female characters that you recall from each of these programs.

Program 1	Program 2	Program 3
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Place a check beside each of the male (adult and children) characters that conform to the traditional ideology that says boys are rough-and-tumble and love sports and that men are tough, work outside of the home, and take care of their families financially. Place a check beside each of the female (adult and children) characters that conform to the traditional ideology that says girls are sweet and pretty and women are soft and nurturing and take care of the family.

prime time television's self-interest to promote characters and themes that discourage women from buying products that pay for a program's survival.

### *Gender Ideology in Entertainment Media*

This is hegemony, socialization without the use of force, at its subtle best. TV entertainment executives, directors, producers, and advertisers do not participate in hegemony because they are evil, bad guys. They participate in perpetuating stereotypical images of women because it is in their economic best interest and because it is the world they live in and from which they benefit. But the most compelling aspect of this hegemony is that it is held by men and women alike who are accustomed to and often see traditional gender roles as so standard and normal that hegemonic structures, limits, and barriers are all but invisible.

One way to examine the operation of hegemony and to make the invisible visible is to go directly to prime time television and use a simple content analysis in a small sample to understand how it works. Chapter One describes ideology as "a



system of meaning that helps define and explain the world and that makes value judgments about the world" (Croteau and Hoynes 1997, 163). Ideology in entertainment media works best when it operates at a less than conscious and less than visible level and is applied to aspects of the social order that are considered the norm and rarely questioned. Some examples of traditional ideology about gender are:

- real boys are rough-and-tumble and love sports;
- real girls are sweet and pretty;
- real men are tough and work and take care of the family financially; and
- real women are soft and nurturing.

Can you find any examples in contemporary entertainment television that support this simple ideology about gender? Can you think of any examples of entertainment television from the past that support this ideology? Complete the survey in Media Activity 2.3 for a better understanding of how gender ideology operates in prime time television.

If more than half of the characters listed display these traditional traits, the program is likely to reflect a dominant gender ideology. If less than half of the characters display these traditional traits, the program most likely offers a different gender ideology. If half of the characters display these traits and half do not, it is most likely that the program conveys a mixed gender ideology. While this sample is neither large nor representative, it does give an indication of an often invisible framework that exists on prime time television.

From your analysis, what do you conclude about the way that gender within the family and the family itself are represented in your sample? Do you see any consistent or repeated patterns in the programs you reviewed? Is there a framework or a somewhat uniform story that is being told about men and women in the family? Is there a norm that is repeated about the configuration of the family? As you uncover and understand these messages about the family on prime time television, you will begin to make your own independent judgments about whether and to what extent television serves as a force to socialize boys and girls, and men and women, to play their assigned roles in the family and society.

### Film

Not surprisingly, the history of the depiction of women in film often runs parallel to the history of women's treatment in American society. In the early 1900s, industrialization produced leisure time and the split into public/private spheres of labor for those in the middle classes and above. During this time, it was an important societal norm for the middle class woman to be traditionally feminine and run a smooth household. Yet there were also women in the labor force in 1900. Eighteen percent of the working population was female. Working class women were employed in sweatshops and factories 48 to 60 hours per week and earned \$3 to \$6

per week (Rosen 1973, 19). "The birth of the movies coincided with—and hastened—the genesis of modern woman" (Rosen 1973, 23).

The sweetheart of the early 1900s film was Mary Pickford. Her specialty was the winsome waif, the sweet ragamuffin who appealed to Victorian audiences. During the 1920s several genres of film developed that portrayed women in clear and concrete roles. There was the continuation of the good girl as originated by Mary Pickford. There was the flapper who was in danger of becoming a bad girl, and there was the chorus girl often portrayed by Gloria Swanson or Joan Crawford (Rosen, 1973, 99).

By the end of 1941, the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States had officially entered World War II. Women entered the work force with a bang. The previous call to middle class femininity, which involved sustaining the hearth and home, switched to a call for patriotic women to support their men at war by going to work. With men off to war, the movie audience changed and for the first time there were a preponderance of films made that were dubbed "women's pictures." Some of these films such as *Spellbound* (1945) and *Mildred Pierce* (1945) explored women's lives and emotions and careers while others such as the Katharine Hepburn/Spencer Tracy classics *Adam's Rib* (1949) and *Woman of the Year* (1942) explored a new version of a woman who could be simultaneously feminine and independent (Rosen 1973, 190).

"Had Hollywood built on its image of the career woman, films might have acted as a more positive force in shaping the role of women in years to come. But as the men returned home from the war, box-office—and social—demands changed. Slowly heroines moved into the background, becoming less aggressive or incapable of working out their own fates" (Rosen 1973, 201). By the late 1940s more than 3 million women had resigned or been fired from their wartime jobs (Douglas 1994, 47). And film, rather than reflecting this phenomenal change in the roles of men and women, reverted to women's role as playful, as love object, or as steadfast companion. *The Best Years of Our Lives*, starring Fredric March and Myrna Loy, won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1947 and was a powerful portrayal of men coming home from war, and their joy, agony, and ambivalence. The film, however, demonstrated no parallel transition or difficulty for women, but rather depicted women as remaining constant throughout and after the war, lovingly, patiently, and unambivalently supporting their men.

Over the years, film has inaccurately reflected working women. In 1930, over one-third of American films reviewed by the *New York Times* featured working women in the leading female role. In 1975, just over one-fourth of these films featured working women. "Compare this decline in Hollywood representations with the extraordinary growth in the percentage of actual adult women who work, from less than 20 percent in 1930 to 56 percent in 1975" (Galerstein 1989, xviii).

During the 1950s, 75 percent of women were married by the time they were nineteen (Rosen 1973, 245). During this Eisenhower era, there were signs of conformity in suburbia contrasted by the development of the Beat Generation and the



seeds of the civil rights and women's movements. During this era, there were few representations of powerful, independent or career minded women in film. Women were catching their men in *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953) and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954). They were preparing for marriage in *Father of the Bride* (1950) and *High Society* (1956). They were discontented wives and lovers in *From Here to Eternity* (1953). Many films featured no women at all, such as *Twelve Angry Men* (1957) and *Mister Roberts* (1965). There were the lovelorn and perky women in rock and roll-influenced films such as *April Love* (1957), *Tammy and the Bachelor* (1957), and *Gidget* (1959). By the late 1950s Doris Day had emerged as the symbol of the struggle of the virginal woman (in which the virgin always won) in *Pillow Talk* (1959) and *That Touch of Mink* (1962) (Rosen 1973, 205–305). By contrast, the 1950s was also the decade of Marilyn Monroe as the ultimate sex symbol.

In 1962 Helen Gurley Brown wrote *Sex and the Single Girl*, which advised women on romance and sex for its own sake; birth control pills began to be widely prescribed. In 1963 Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, which analyzed the dissatisfaction of the trapped middle class housewife. Yet the early 1960s were dominated by films such as those in the James Bond series, which treated women as sex objects and made intelligent women invisible. Barbra Streisand dominated the roles of strong women that were available in films such as *Funny Girl* (1968) and *What's Up Doc?* (1972) (Lout 1995, 226).

By 1964, Beatlemania was in full swing. The youth and drug culture emerged in Haight Ashbury, college dormitories, and concerts. Yet the mid-1960s film industry chose to depict teenage angst with such films as *Bikini Beach* (1964), *Beach Party* (1963), and *Muscle Beach Party* (1964) (Rosen, 1973, 317). "The most astonishing aspect of Hollywood in the mid-1960s was its total inability to reflect the tapestry of youth culture—and perhaps its unwillingness to do so. During these years of turmoil, the industry opted out of making meaningful contributions in interpreting the role of the new young woman" (Rosen 1973, 317). Instead we got *Mary Poppins* (1964), *The Sound of Music* (1965), and *My Fair Lady* (1964); all were period pieces—the lead characters were all women: an ideal nanny with magic powers, a nun struggling with her own identity, and a street urchin turned lady through the will of a man.

By the mid-1960s, the youth culture began to be explored as Hollywood's awareness of the market potential of the youth audience was awakened with the popularity of *The Graduate* in 1967. By 1969 films such as *Easy Rider*, *Midnight Cowboy*, and *Alice's Restaurant* focused attention on the emerging alternative youth culture. Yet, few of these youth films depicted strong women or reflected the struggle with identity, role, and sexuality that young women were facing.

While the early 1970s continued by and large to lock women in stereotypical roles, there were some breakthrough films such as *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) in which a married woman who has played her part as wife well is divorced, struggles with and finds her independent identity. Other strong female characters were de-

icted by Jane Fonda in *Kluge* (1971), *Julia* (1977), and *China Syndrome* (1979). Sally Field depicted a complex working class woman who becomes a hero in the film *Norma Rae* (1979). *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1970) depicted the most horrible manifestations of the feminine mystique, the trapped middle class housewife. *Turning Point* (1977) provided a complex portrait of two strong women who were dancers—one of whom chose a dance career and the other of whom chose to raise a family.

The top box office films in the 1980s were:

- *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*
- *Return of the Jedi*
- *The Empire Strikes Back*
- *Raiders of the Lost Ark*
- *Ghostbusters*
- *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*
- *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*
- *Beverly Hills Cop*
- *Back to the Future* (Internet Movie Database 1999).

Other than the fact that Harrison Ford appeared in five of these films, what do these popular films convey about gender? (Ford also was cast as the school principal in a sixth film, *E.T.*, but received no credit for this role because the scene was deleted from the final production.) Of the nine films, eight were categorized as either action or adventure. In all of these action and adventure films, male actors received top billing, and only Karen Allen in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and Kate Capshaw in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* received as high as second billing. Despite her higher billing, Allen's role was that of a shrill female victim clad in a long white dress and heels who shrieked as Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones saved her from snakes and Nazis. All nine of the action films were dominated by male characters and actors. *Ghostbusters*, the one film that was typed as a comedy, was also overwhelmingly male.

The top money-making films in the 1990s were:

- *Jurassic Park*
- *Independence Day*
- *The Lion King*
- *Forrest Gump*
- *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*
- *Ghost*
- *Twister*
- *Titanic*
- *Pretty Woman*
- *Mrs. Doubtfire*



## Media Activity 2.4 Gender and This Year's Top Box Office Films

### Instructions

Follow the steps below to find and analyze gender in the top box office hits for the current year.

**Step One:** Log on to the All-Time Box Office Leaders website at <http://www.filmsite.org.boxoffice.html>. The site is organized according to two lists. The first list is the top 100 box office hits throughout film history and the second list is by decade.

**Step Two:** Scroll down to the current decade and year.

**Step Three:** List the top money-making films for the current year.

**Step Four:** Log on to the Internet Movie Database at <http://us.imdb.com>.

**Step Five:** Find each of the films you identified in Step Three in the Internet Movie Database and review the plot summary and the acting credits for each film.

**Step Six:** Answer the questions below for each film.

- What genre were these films? (action, adventure, comedy, drama, romance)
- List the major characters for each film. (Remember that major characters are those without whom the plot would make no sense.)
- List the first two actors in the billing order on the credits and indicate whether they are male or female.

**Step Seven:** Complete the chart below with the information you obtained in Step Six.

Name of Film	Genre	Major characters		1st billing		2nd billing	
		character	character	female	male	female	male
TOTALS							

- *Men in Black*
- *Saving Private Ryan*
- *Armageddon*
- *The Fugitive*
- *Toy Story* (Internet Movie Database 1999).

These hits reflect more diversity in genre than the 1980s. Fifty-five percent of the films were action or adventure, 15 percent were children's animation, 15 percent were comedies, and 15 percent were romance. It was only in *Twister* that a woman, Helen Hunt, received top billing. Women received second billing in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Linda Hamilton as a human action figure), *Forest Gump* (Robin Wright as the misguided and on-again, off-again girlfriend of Forest), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Sally Field as the uptight, shrill ex-wife), *Titanic* (Kate Winslet as the rich young woman who falls in love with a poor, handsome artist), and *Pretty Woman* (Julia Roberts as the prostitute with a big heart and a great flare for classy clothes). Male characters dominated a full 76 percent of these films.

Even the few major female characters in these popular 1980s and 1990s films were frequently simple and one-dimensional objects of romance or foils for the main character who, with one exception, was always male. Most of these films depicted important relationships or conflicts between men. A few depicted romance and romantic conflict between men and women, but none of these box office hits portrayed women's relationships.

The top money making-films rarely overlap with the films that are listed by critics as the top one hundred films, or with those that received the Academy Awards' Best Picture recognition. Some of these critically acclaimed films feature major female characters who defy simplification and stereotypes. Academy Award winners such as *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *The English Patient* (1996), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Out of Africa* (1985), and *Ordinary People* (1980) portrayed women who were strong, obstinate, mysterious, and filled with the contradictions that occur in real people. But these characters are the exception. Among the eighteen films awarded Best Picture by the Academy from 1980 to 1987, ten were dominated by male characters. The 1995 film *Waiting to Exhale*, based on the book by Terry McMillan, was one of the first mainstream popular films to feature an ensemble cast of African-American women. While the characters were only somewhat complex, there was diversity among them.

Roles for women in film have expanded and changed since the early twentieth century when waitresses and chorus girls, virgins and whores dominated the scene. Yet male characters are still featured in most films. This underscores messages learned in school and in life about which gender is most interesting and important.

To determine some of the contemporary gender messages in high-earning films for the year in which you are reading, conduct your own research by following the steps in Media Activity 2.4.



After you conduct the research in Media Activity 2.4, answer the following questions:

What different genres were represented in your sample? How many major male characters and how many major female characters were there in the films you identified? What were the total numbers of male and female actors that received first and second billing? Overall, do men or women seem to dominate the money-making films of this year, or is their representation fairly even? What messages do these films convey about the relative significance of men and women?

You could proceed further and design a content analysis that examines physical appearance and personality similar to the one we conducted about prime time television in Media Activity 2.1. Through the decades of women in film, there have been more complex and independent women characters who are defined in broader terms than chorus girl or wife. Yet, the studies we have reviewed, as well as our own content analysis, reveal that women are still under-represented and stereotyped in many films. The top box office hits are those that are obviously the most widely viewed; these are the films in which women are most notably absent and stereotyped. This is another piece of the puzzle that contributes to socialization regarding gender.

### *Gender and Popular Music*

Follow the instructions in Media Activity 2.5 to investigate some of the gender messages in popular music. Once again, a word of caution as we begin to analyze these images of gender. This content analysis utilizes an extremely small sample so that your results will simply help you to better understand how messages about gender and romance are portrayed in popular music and what kind of messages are conveyed in this particular limited sample.

When you complete the questions in the activity, the next step is to summarize each of the nine items both in raw numbers and percentages. For example, in number 9, if of the five relationships in the songs there was one that engaged in everyday conversation and four that did not, that would mean that “yes” would be 20 percent and “no” would be 80 percent. As you review the summary of each item, what have you found? Is there an indication of whether men or women are the aggressors, the most romantic, and the most sexual? What does this small sample tell you about roles of men and women in popular music? To what degree are the relationships featured intense, dramatic, romantic, conversational? What messages are conveyed about the nature of romantic relationships? The dominant ideology of gender roles in romance consists of the man as pursuer and most interested in sex and the woman as the pursued and most interested in romance. To what extent did your sample reinforce or challenge the dominant ideology of the gender roles in romantic relationships and the nature of the relationship itself? Are the relationships in this sample similar or different to the relationships you have had?

Popular music has traditionally featured romance as its central theme with lyr-

ics sung by both men and women, proclaiming the joy of love and the agony of its loss. In the 1930s and 1940s Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, and others rhapsodized and idealized love and romance in melodic ballads. In the 1950s when rock and roll began, the popular music scene exploded, however, and control of the industry and reflection of gender in the music became more highly contested.

In the 1950s, the emergence of the first “girl groups” began with the Shirelles’ top ten song, “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?” Written by Carol King, this was the first song by a group of women to make it to the top ten (Lout 1995, 321). “The most important thing about this music and the reason it spoke to us so powerfully, was that it gave voice to all the warring selves inside us struggling blindly and with a crushing sense of insecurity, to force something resembling a coherent identity. Even though the girl groups were produced and managed by men, it was in their music that the contradictory messages about female sexuality and rebelliousness were most poignantly and authentically expressed” (Douglas 1994, 87). These groups sang about dependence on men, rebellion, sexuality, resistance, and compliance.

More than film or television, these songs of the 1950s reflected the struggle and upheaval in the changing lives and roles of young men and women. The lyrics of “I Will Follow Him” sung by Little Peggy March demonstrate the traditional compliant girl who goes to the ends of the earth for the man she loves. “Sweet Talking Guy” by the Chiffons demonstrates the sexual pull of a “sweet talking guy” and the struggle of the girl to sort out love and sex. By the mid-1960s the “girl” singer replaced the “girl group” and more women entered the musical scene singing a wide range of songs with a variety of gender representations. By and large these soloists and groups depicted girls with a single purpose—finding and keeping their true love.

Before continuing the analysis of the next round of female singers, it is interesting to note the language that is used for the women and young women who sang popular songs in the 1950s and 1960s. Male singers were called “singers” or “rock and roll groups” or “recording artists,” but female singers were called “girl groups” or “girl singers.” This language difference is significant in two ways. First, the terms for men are generic and assume that male singers are the norm; second, the term for females is the diminutive, childlike “girl.”

From 1963 to 1965 there were a total of sixty-nine songs that made it to the number one spot on the popular music chart. Of these songs, only fifteen were recorded by women. Some examples of these songs are the 1963 “He’s So Fine” by the Chiffons in which the woman sings lyrics such as “If I were a queen and he asked me to leave my throne, I’d do anything that he asked, anything to make him my own. ‘Cause he’s so fine.” Then there is the classic 1964 Mary Wells hit “My Guy,” in which she praises her guy and all of the things she would pass by for him. The 1965 Supremes song “Stop in the Name of Love” begs the man to stop seeing another woman for sex and to stay with his woman for real love.

During the mid-1960s Lulu sang “To Sir with Love,” while Leslie Gore poured out her heart with such romantic sorrows and triumphs as “It’s My Party” and “It’s



### Media Activity 2.5 Gender and Popular Music

#### Instructions

Select a minimum of five songs that are currently among the top ten on the music charts. You may choose songs that are on the Top 40, Country, or Rhythm and Blues charts. Select songs that depict a romantic or sexual relationship. For each song, answer the questions below. Do not make any assumptions about the relationship. Take all information strictly from the lyrics.

#### Role of Men and Women

- Who initiates or pursues the relationship?
  - male \_\_\_\_\_
  - female \_\_\_\_\_
  - both \_\_\_\_\_
  - neither \_\_\_\_\_
  - cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_
- Who waits for someone to initiate or pursue the relationship?
  - male \_\_\_\_\_
  - female \_\_\_\_\_
  - both \_\_\_\_\_
  - neither \_\_\_\_\_
  - cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_
- Who appears most interested in the sexual part of the relationship?
  - male \_\_\_\_\_
  - female \_\_\_\_\_
  - both \_\_\_\_\_
  - neither \_\_\_\_\_
  - cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_
- Who appears least interested in or ambivalent about the sexual part of the relationship?
  - male \_\_\_\_\_
  - female \_\_\_\_\_

(cont'd)

Judy's "Turn to Cry." Yet in "You Don't Own Me," Gore deviates from the school-girl dependence on her guy to declare independence and the unwillingness to change for a boy. Then there was Tina Turner belting out strong songs full of female lust and desire and Aretha Franklin insisting on "Respect." While Turner wanted lust and Franklin wanted respect, their songs and styles shared a strength and an assertion of their rights and needs vis-à-vis men.

- both \_\_\_\_\_
- neither \_\_\_\_\_
- cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who seems to romanticize the relationship the most?

- male \_\_\_\_\_
- female \_\_\_\_\_
- both \_\_\_\_\_
- neither \_\_\_\_\_
- cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_

6. Who seems to romanticize the relationship the least?

- male \_\_\_\_\_
- female \_\_\_\_\_
- both \_\_\_\_\_
- neither \_\_\_\_\_
- cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_

#### Nature of the Relationship

7. Which of these words most closely describes the relationship?

- unromantic \_\_\_\_\_
- somewhat romantic \_\_\_\_\_
- romantic \_\_\_\_\_
- cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_

8. Which of these words most closely describes the relationship?

- light \_\_\_\_\_
- moderate \_\_\_\_\_
- a mix of light and intense \_\_\_\_\_
- intense, dramatic \_\_\_\_\_
- cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_

9. Is there everyday conversation in the relationship?

- yes \_\_\_\_\_
- no \_\_\_\_\_
- cannot tell \_\_\_\_\_

By the mid-1960s the so-called "British invasion" by the Beatles and their many clones dominated the American music scene and white female soloists lost much of their audience. During this time, the only American music with a substantial audience was Motown, which included a second wave of the "girl groups," including the Supremes, Martha and the Vandellas, and the Marvelettes. While not as conventionally popular as the others, another female phenomenon hit the music



scene of the 1960s and that was political folk music as sung by artists such as Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, and Joan Baez (Lout 1995, 322). These women were singing of peace and the environment as well as love and romance. But there were still few images of strong independent girls and women, or women struggling with their own gender identities in a rapidly shifting society.

"Music is perhaps one of the most powerful tools for the conveyance of ideas and emotions. It is also a great vehicle for propaganda. Lyrics in music reinforce a culture's values. Rock music, as part of the youth culture, always sent out strong messages, picked up by listeners, consciously or unconsciously. Embedded with the messages are female and male portrayals" (Lout 1995, 324). And it appears that both the singers and the lyrics reinforced traditional expectations of the roles of males and females in U.S. society.

By the 1970s rock was a central component of the cultural revolution and most rock bands were male. Tina Turner and Janis Joplin were early exceptions, followed soon by women musicians, such as Bonnie Raitt, Joan Armatrading, and Joan Jeti, who began to play electric instruments. A study conducted in 1970–79 revealed that fewer than 12 of more than 260 prominent musical acts featured individual women or women in a band. "Females growing up in the 1960s and 1970s were offered narrow roles to emulate. As teenagers, they listened to chipmunks, love-crazed girl groups, folk madonnas, or sexy Black singers. When rock became popular, teenage girls could be 'groovy chicks' or 'uptight.' In general, women's roles in rock music were prescribed by men and handed to women to fulfill. Real problems (being different, peer pressure, abuse, homosexuality) were rarely discussed. Yet, there was little room for growth or diversity" (Lout 1995, 325). Janis Ian's song "Society's Child" was a notable exception, telling the poignant and politically charged story of a girl's family's rejection of an interracial relationship.

By the 1980s the number of female bands had increased and 1981 ushered in a new era—that of music television or MTV. In the early days of television broadcast, producers saw audiences as largely homogeneous, undifferentiated. As cable developed the idea of capturing a more narrow audience with buying power, the television industry began to make programming decisions based on the results of demographic research and its potential to attract sponsors. Fred Silverman at NBC made broadcast history by perfecting this concept, using market research to determine program content. This research said that young adults ages 18 to 29, mostly female, were the main buyers of television goods. Bob Pittman followed this marketing strategy to create an audience of buyers for MTV (Lewis 1990, 17).

MTV's target audience was 12 to 34 year olds whom Pittman defined as a cultural group that grew up on two dominant forms of media—television and rock and roll. The goal of MTV was to combine these two entertainment phenomena. MTV established another strategy that began as a financial consideration and ultimately dictated programmatic decisions. Pittman decided to replicate the standard radio format, which utilized free demos on the air, by using free video demos promoted by the companies that produced them (Lewis 1990, 21). "What had

begun as a practical approach to securing cheap (free) programming within the parameters of MTV's concept ended up being a factor that determined MTV's program content. By getting record companies to supply videos, MTV ensured that the videos would look like advertisements for record companies" (Lewis 1990, 24).

Prior to the advent of MTV, the musical and ideological foundations of rock music and popular music had been quite different. Some musicians, audiences, and music critics saw pop music as simple, "bubblegum" and formulaic while viewing rock as the "people's" music—more complex and cutting edge in both music and lyrics. Prior to MTV, hard rock had taken a more anticommmercial stance—which MTV turned upside down (Lewis 1990, 28–35).

The commercially driven MTV became a central cultural phenomenon for American adolescents and its depiction of gender has had a strong impact. Teenagers developed their own fashion and style based on popular music videos. Girls assumed the dark roots with blonde hair and clothing style of Madonna in the 1980s and in the 1990s young boys wore the scarves and goggles of 'N Sync. Adolescence has assumed an important role in U.S. culture. It is often a life phase in which young people are given or take some freedom and permission to explore sexuality and rebel against authority. Yet this has been a largely masculine tradition in American culture in which the construct of femininity restricts how girls participate in this rebellion and exploration (Lewis 1990, 28–35).

"Adolescence and masculinity are united ideologically to support a social system of male privilege. . . . Toward this end, boys learn to feel comfortable in public space, adjust to competitive pressures, network with their male peers, build a familial support system, and to prepare for risk-taking in future work endeavors. However, the social authorization given to such practices is directed specifically to boys, and does not extend as fully to girls" (Lewis 1990, 35). The videos in MTV "were united by a central focus on articulating adolescence within the context of male-adolescent experience and sexual desire" (Lewis 1990, 53).

A 1987 study of MTV music videos found that men were more likely to be aggressive, violent, or dominant while women were more likely to wear revealing clothing, show affection, and pursue sex (Seidman 1992, 209). By 1989, the increasing presence of female singers seemed to have changed those numbers. In 63 percent of female or mostly female groups, women were treated in the same way as men (Lout 1995, 335).

The careers of Tina Turner, Cyndi Lauper, and Madonna represent the contradictions in MTV gender ideology and the opportunity for women to succeed. These women exerted some creative control over their music and its production, and their careers and personal stories offered inspiration and served as role models to adolescent girls. While Turner's and Madonna's images were hard and sexual, their lives told a different story of rising above abuse and dependence and creating and controlling their own music and images. "The emergence of female-adolescent discourse on MTV is important politically because it has provided a vehicle



for girls to speak about their experiences as female adolescents. But it is also important because it has expanded the reconsideration of gender inequality to include adolescence, thus beginning the much needed work of acknowledging the fact that oppressed women begin their lives as oppressed girls" (Lewis 1990, 234).

As in other forms of entertainment media and popular culture, the impact of popular music is measured primarily through repetitive images. To understand the role of women, men, and romance in popular music it is critical to determine if there is any range, diversity, and complexity in the images or if these images of men, women, and romance reinforce the dominant ideology of gender in the United States.

What are some images of love, romance, and sex in popular music as conveyed in lyrics, music videos, CD covers? What kind of gender roles do these images of love, romance, and sex convey? In what ways do these images reinforce or challenge conventional gender ideology?

It is useful to first examine what constitutes dominant ideology in the interaction of gender with love, sex, and romance. The first aspect of a traditional ideology involves the roles played by men and women in heterosexual romance. The conventional role of men in romance and sex is that of the initiator or the aggressor, the one most interested in sex, the detached partner, the one least interested in romance. The conventional role of women is that of the pursued, uninterested, or torn about sex, the involved partner, the one engrossed in romance. The dominant ideology involves a dramatization of love as intense, highly romanticized and/or tragic as opposed to a relationship of intermittent and perhaps more moderate passion, conversation, conflict, and resolution. Of course, one could easily argue that a song that lyricizes moderation and mundane conversation would not ignite the audience or record sales. But given the impact that popular music has on its young listeners, it is critical to understand the messages that are being offered.

### Chapter Summary

When my daughter was four years old, she took her first dance class with seven or eight other little girls. The dance teacher chose the music, choreographed a piece, and designed costumes for their first recital performance. The girls and the parents were very excited and exuberant about the process and the experience. When I learned what the selected song was, my heart sank. It was "Chapel of Love" by the Dixiecupps. The lyrics were traditionally romantic and centered around going to the chapel of love to get married. The costumes were white leotards with silver sparkles and a headband with material made to look like a wedding veil. All of the other moms were cooing over the cuteness of the music, the dance, and the costume. I knew this event by itself would not damage or finish off the socialization of these girls permanently. But this was only one event in many that would teach them that cuteness, relationships to men, and being brides were at the core of what it meant to be a girl. However, my own socialization got in the way of intervening. I thought that if I protested the content, no matter how politely, I would be viewed

as a curmudgeon at best and a spoiler at worst. Socialized as I was to be a woman who was polite, easy to get along with, and pleasing to others, I chose not to raise my concerns.

But the more individuals understand how each of these events in the life of children adds up to limit their ultimate choices and independence, the more people and institutions will have the wherewithal to intervene and interrupt. Schools can examine the policies and practices that value only received and separate knowing. They can provide information and strategies for change to teachers about what contributes to lowering I.Q. points in adolescent girls. Parents can offer more choices to children early in their lives so that their boys and girls can decide whether to play with dolls or trucks or both. Institutions can analyze employment and salaries according to gender and promote changes that are more equitable. Individuals can read more about gender history and socialization and can find ways to interrupt gender oppression when they see it. Film, television, and music can portray girls and women as complex characters with a range of personalities and roles in life.

The connections between personal experience, formal knowledge, and entertainment media are key to an understanding of U.S. gender socialization in general and your own gender experience and expression in particular. This chapter guides you through the discovery of what you were taught formally and informally about what it means to be male or female in this society. We are born a particular sex and taught how to be a particular gender. The concepts of dominant, alternative, and mixed gender ideology are fundamental to the understanding of what we were taught about gender and what other ways of being male and female are available. Entertainment media in the forms of popular music, film, and television are central tools of socialization and send strong messages about what it means to be a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. Entertainment assessment tools are a means to uncover these messages and to determine whether a particular song, film, program, or an entire genre reinforces or challenges dominant gender ideology. The ability to understand how our personal gender values and behavior are formed is the foundation to making independent choices about how and who we want to be.

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