

*Sixth  
Edition*

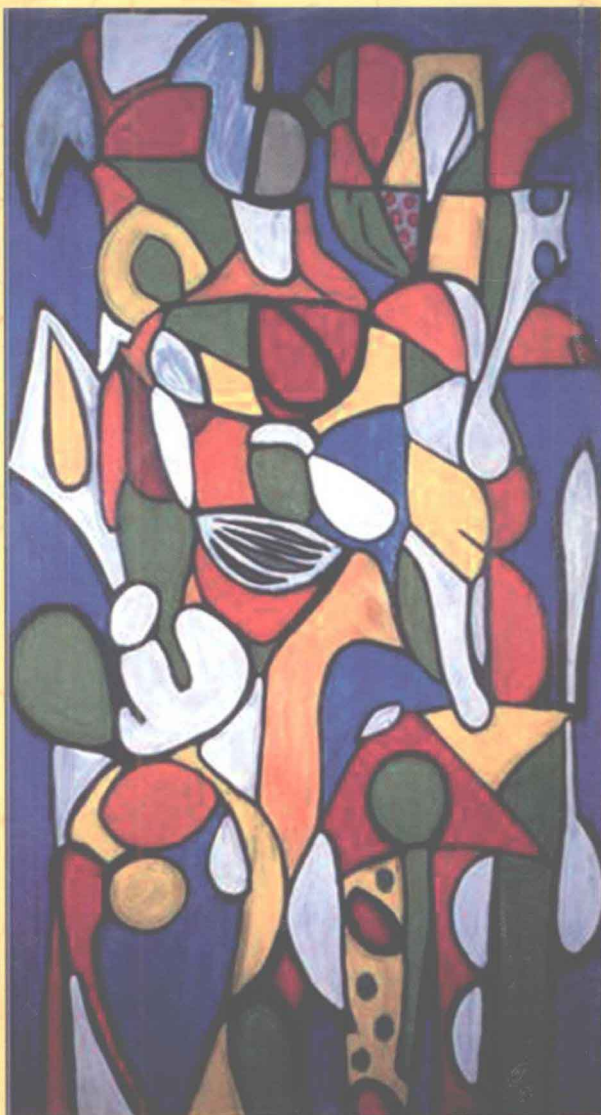
THINKING ABOUT

# WOMEN

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SOCIOLOGICAL  
PERSPECTIVES  
ON  
SEX AND GENDER

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MARGARET L. ANDERSEN

*Sixth Edition*



THINKING  
ABOUT WOMEN  
*Sociological Perspectives  
on Sex and Gender*

**Margaret L. Andersen**

*University of Delaware*



Boston New York San Francisco  
Mexico City Montreal Toronto London Madrid Munich Paris  
Hong Kong Singapore Tokyo Cape Town Sydney

❖ For my grandmother,  
Sybil R. Wangberg  
(1895–1995)

*A woman who always said she was just ordinary  
but who was very special to those of us who loved her*

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# Preface

When I first wrote *Thinking About Women* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I do not think I ever imagined that feminist scholarship would become as firmly anchored in higher education as it is now. Nor did I realize that some of the founding mothers of the study of gender would now be senior (and, in some cases, retired) faculty. But here is the sixth edition—an edition that reflects more than a quarter of a century of feminist scholarship in sociology and its sister disciplines. Had you told me in 1983 (the first year that *Thinking About Women* appeared in print) that the book would be published in this many editions, I would not have believed it. For younger readers it may be hard to imagine how marginalized the study of women and gender was not that many years ago. Women are now a strong presence in higher education, and women's studies has become an established field. In sociology, indeed in every social science field, feminist scholarship has transformed much of what is thought, known, and questioned, and the study of gender has become a legitimate and influential area of research and teaching. Women are no longer the complete outsiders they once were within higher education.

But we should not let the visible presence of women in higher education and the growth of gender and women's studies blind us to the continuing realities of gender discrimination and institutional processes that still differentiate women's and men's experiences—both in higher education and in society at large. As you will learn in *Thinking About Women*, gender influences everything, from our immediate bodily experiences to the most abstract institutional processes.

The evolution of *Thinking About Women* over the years reflects the intellectual and political currents that have marked the last quarter century of feminism in the United

States. If you looked back at the first edition, you would find a more strident tone, one centered in a critique of how existing knowledge was distorted because of the exclusion of women. As feminist scholarship has grown over the years, feminist criticism has continued, but there is now less criticism about what is wrong with existing scholarship and, instead, more elaboration (both empirical and theoretical) of the significance of gender in structuring all social relationships and social institutions. Moreover, a critical dialogue exists within feminist studies about the consequences of restricting feminist analysis to the experiences of White, middle class, heterosexual women. Thus, one of the most important developments within feminist studies is increased attention to the diversity of women's experiences. Whereas the cutting edge of feminist scholarship in the 1970s was simply establishing women as a legitimate topic for serious study, now the diversity of race, class, sexuality, and other social locations drives many of the new insights of feminist work.

Readers encountering feminist scholarship for the first time should understand that thinking about the diversity among women is not a new phenomenon, nor one that can be attributed only to the feminist movement. There is a long and rich history of thinking about women by African American thinkers (women and men) and others whose words and thoughts do not always appear in historical accounts of the emergence of feminism. This tradition predates the contemporary feminist movement and can be found in the narratives, speeches, letters and other documents of U.S. history. Similarly, labor organizers, abolitionists, and others who have dared to challenge the established race, gender, and class order of their times often articulated feminist ideals, although they are not

always associated with the emergence of feminism. And there are, no doubt, many who believed in feminist principles, but whose words and thoughts are lost to us now. This is an important lesson: Knowledge about those who have been excluded from mainstream institutions does not just emerge from intellectual traditions, but is deeply rooted in movements for social justice.

Thus, the scholarship reviewing the significance of gender that you will find throughout this book owes a great debt to the activists who have worked over the years on behalf of all women. *Thinking About Women* is a book about scholarship, but it is also a book about political change—change in how we think about women and change in how we organize society to better women's lives. Contemporary readers will bring insights of their own to understanding gender and its influence in their lives, and they will, I hope, also work for changes in their own times that will influence generations of women and men in years ahead.

## Organization of the Book

*Thinking About Women* is organized in four major parts. Part I introduces students to feminism and the study of gender, including the growth of women's studies and, now, the field of men's studies. In this section, the book provides a framework for studying the importance of studying examining gender and how the development of women's studies has transformed thinking across the social sciences. At the suggestion of reviewers, there is now more discussion of the growth of men's studies as it has grown from feminist scholarship.

Part II, "Gender, Culture, and Sex," focuses on the social construction of gender and representations of gender in culture. Chapter 2 in this section has been reorganized to flow from the micro-level of the for-

mation of gender identity to the macrolevel of social institutions. Throughout, the focus is on how social institutions frame the construction of gender identity. The new edition includes more discussion of the questions feminists scholars bring to the relationship between biology and culture, and there is also more focus on the concept of gendered institutions. The inclusion of the section on "socialization across the life course" also gives greater attention to gender and aging. Chapter 3, "Gender and Culture," uses the perspective of the sociology of knowledge to examine how representations of gender in popular culture shape concepts of gender and gender identities. Chapter 4, on "Sexuality and Intimate Relationships," studies the social construction of sexuality and the influence of gender in the formation of intimate relationships, including dating and friendships. There is new material here on how homophobia influences lesbian and gay experiences, as well as new material on interracial relationships, as they are influenced by gender and race.

Part III, "Gender and Social Institutions," examines the institutional structures of work, family, health, religion, criminal justice, and politics, and has a new chapter on entitled "Gender, Education, and Science." Throughout these chapters, the focus is on how gender is structured within institutions, with data and empirical research in these areas updated throughout. Chapter 5, on gender and work, focuses on how economic restructuring is affecting women and men at work. The chapter includes a historical overview of women's work and presents current research on data comparing men's and women's status in the labor market. The chapter also has new material on poverty and welfare reform and ends by discussing housework as a form of labor. Chapter 6, on families, provides a historical context for the development of family forms in Western culture and focuses on the diversity of contemporary families

and how they influence and are influenced by gender relations. The chapter includes material on marriage and divorce, lesbian and gay families, family violence, teen pregnancy, child care, and care work. Chapter 7, on gender and health, examines the connection between gender and health, including new material on eating disorders, alcohol, drugs, and smoking, and updated material on women and AIDS. The chapter includes a section on gender and reproduction, as well as a section on the status of women in the health care system. Chapter 8, "Women and Religion," is organized around the question of whether religion is a source of liberation or oppression for women. It includes material on religion and the emergence of feminism, women's roles in religious institutions, and how religious beliefs influence gender ideology. Chapter 9, on women, crime, and deviance, includes material on women both as victims of crime, including more research on rape, and as criminals. Chapter 10, on women and politics, examines the status of women in political institutions and the military (updated through 2000) and includes a discussion of the emergence of the women's movement. The new chapter (Chapter 11) on gender, education, and science includes material on the history of women's education, as well as contemporary material on gender and schooling. The section of this chapter on women and science includes material on the status of women in science, as well as feminist debates about gender and the social construction of scientific knowledge.

Part IV, "Gender and Social Change," is an updated discussion of the frameworks of feminist theory. When *Thinking About Women* was first written, the major frameworks of feminist theory were liberal feminism, socialist feminism, and radical feminism. Although the ideas and politics raised by these perspectives are still important, the evolution of feminist thought has brought new paradigms to theoretical discussions of gender. Thus, the sixth edition of *Thinking About*

*Women*—long known for its inclusion of race and class—has an expanded discussion of multiracial feminism. Also in this section is more discussion of the influence of post-modernist feminism. The chapters discussing theory place liberal, socialist, and radical feminism in the context of the historical evolution of feminist questions—still relating them to the implications of different theoretical paradigms, not only for theoretical analysis, but also for social policy and social change.

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### *New to the Sixth Edition*

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The most obvious revision in the sixth edition of *Thinking About Women* is the addition of a new chapter on gender, education, and science (Chapter 11). This chapter reviews the history of women in public education and contemporary research on gender and schooling, including the connection between gender and educational achievement, gender and educational curricula, and the connections between gender, race, and class inequality in education. There is a separate section on women in higher education. In addition, the chapter reviews research on the status of women in science and reviews feminist scholarship on gender and the social construction of scientific knowledge.

In addition to the new chapter, the final part of the book on feminist theory has been substantially revised to reflect contemporary frameworks of feminist thought. The chapter on liberal feminism has been retained to provide students with a solid understanding of the philosophical, political, and theoretical framework of this still-current feminist perspective. The original chapter on socialist and radical feminism has been revised to present socialist and radical feminism in terms of their historical importance in the development of the feminist movement and to show how the central questions these two frameworks generate still resonate in con-

temporary feminist thought. Following this discussion, there are new sections detailing the frameworks of multiracial feminism and postmodernist feminism. Throughout this chapter, feminist theory is linked to the politics of the women's movement.

Throughout the book, there is also substantial material on men, in response to reviewers who want their courses on gender to focus on both women and men. Each time this book is revised, some reviewers suggest that the book be retitled, *Thinking About Gender* to reflect the fact that feminist scholarship is not just about women. This is a valid point, but I have continued to keep the original title, not just because of the existing identity of the book, but to emphasize that it is thinking about women that has made us think differently about gender, including thinking differently about men. Thus, although the title is the same, faculty and students will find feminist scholarship about men integrated throughout the book. Those who want supplemental material on men now have a wide range of additional books from which to choose from, including Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner's classic anthology, *Men's Lives* (Allyn & Bacon), a long-term good companion for *Thinking About Women*.

The new edition also incorporates new pedagogical features, such as chapter outlines at the beginning of each chapter. These outlines will help students in their reading comprehension because they can see the major topics and organization of the chapter before they begin reading. Also included are Internet resources, listed at the end of every chapter and intended to give students links that will lead them to Websites that are related to the chapter material. These can also be used for additional class projects and papers. Although Internet addresses change frequently, those presented here are stable sites. This edition also includes more figures and tables throughout, both to teach students how to interpret the presentation of such data and to make the book visually appealing.

The book has been revised throughout to reflect the most recent conclusions from research on gender. Wherever possible, data has also been updated to include data from the 2000 census and other government sources. There are also many new topics that are either added or expanded. For example, Chapters 4 and 6 include new material on interracial dating and marriage; Chapter 3 has new material on gender and immigration. There is more discussion in Chapter 5 on the effects of welfare reform, as well as new material on women's labor in sweatshops. *Thinking About Women* has long been noted for its inclusion of race and class; the new edition is further strengthened in this regard.

### *A Note on Language*

Transforming thought to be more inclusive of gender, race, and class also involves transforming the language we use. The language we use to describe different groups is deeply social and political in nature. It can belittle, trivialize, and marginalize different people and groups. For this reason, being conscious of how you use language is part of changing how you think about gender, race, and class.

In this book, I have capitalized Black because of the specific historical experience of African Americans in the United States and because, increasingly, this practice represents the self-identity of African American people in this country. For consistency, I have then capitalized White. The experience of being White has not historically been associated with a group identity in the same sense that being Black has signified a racial identity. Yet, new scholarship shows how the term White has also been socially and historically constructed. Capitalizing Black and White is not meant to reify nor to essentialize these experiences. Rather, it is intended to capture that both terms refer to groups with particular social and historical experiences. Categories such as Black and White are fraught with

social meaning, with implications far beyond matters of writing style. Although not all readers will agree with my stylistic decisions to capitalize these identities, I hope it will challenge them to probe the sociological meanings of these labels. I also use African American, Black, and Black American interchangeably throughout the book.

I have also used Native American and American Indian interchangeably, recognizing that these labels, like the label Hispanic, Asian American, Black and White American, for that matter, lump together groups whose experiences and identities are quite heterogeneous. These general categories homogenize the experiences of groups with diverse social, cultural, and historical backgrounds. The same is true of the term women of color. These categorical labels nonetheless are meant to reflect the common experiences such groups have and, as such, are sociologically meaningful despite their limitations.

Thus, when referring to Latinos, I use the term Latino generically—to refer to groups of Spanish descent in the United States. I use the feminine form, Latina, where appropriate. Latino and Hispanic are often used interchangeably, and I follow that practice here, particularly when citing other research or data sources (such as the census and government data) that report in terms of “Hispanic.” I use Chicana/Chicano to refer specifically to those of Mexican descent born in the United States.

Readers should also be aware that we are sometimes constrained in how we use language by the source of the material we use. For example, sometimes data in different census publications are only reported as “Black” and “White,” with Hispanics falling into either—or both—categories. Often the census does not report Asian Americans at all; seldom are Native Americans included as an identifiable group in the periodic reports from government data on which sociologists rely. Although some of these practices are changing, authors are limited by what is available to them.

My choices about language and style are not perfect, but language and style reflect ongoing social and political, as well as linguistic, issues. Readers should be aware of the significance of language in discussing the many topics discussed in this book. Given the emergent and contested character of the terms used to refer to gender, sex, and racial-ethnic groups, the only solution is to be aware of the implications of the language you choose.

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## *Pedagogical Features*

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The new edition of *Thinking About Women* retains the pedagogical features of the last edition, but adds some new features. Each chapter now includes Websites that will lead students to resources on the Internet (see **Internet Resources** at the end of each chapter). These sites have been selected for their relevance to the chapter content, but also because they have stable links.

Throughout the book, readers will find more **graphics** that both make the book more visually appealing and easier to read and that give students visual aids that relay important social facts about the chapter content. These graphics can also be used to teach students to interpret and read charts and tables, as well as to think about what questions can be answered—and which cannot—using these representations of data.

This edition also includes **chapter outlines** at the beginning of each chapter. These are an important learning tool, because they show students the major themes and organization of each chapter before they begin their reading. This helps orient students to the chapter material and thus can help their retention of the information and major issues in each chapter.

In addition to these new features, there is a list of key terms at the end of every chapter; all key terms are also included in a glossary at the end of the book. There is also a list of **suggested readings** at the end of each

chapter, with annotations intended to capture student interest. These readings were selected for their relevance to the chapter subject and their accessibility to undergraduate readers. They can also be useful for class projects and research papers, or simply to give students additional reading on topics they find fascinating.

Finally, I have included several **discussion questions/projects for thought** at the conclusion of each chapter to stimulate student interest and provide ideas for classroom projects, research exercises, or group discussions. These questions and projects are meant to provoke further thinking about some of the topics covered in each chapter.

## *Acknowledgments*

I am fortunate to work in a community of scholars who take seriously the study of gender and its relationship to race and class. Over the years, my work has been enriched by collaboration and discussion with faculty and friends who are building more work on race, class, and gender into their thinking and their teaching. There are many people to thank for sharing their ideas with me. I especially thank Tammy Anderson, Maxine Baca Zinn, Anne Bowler, Patricia Hill Collins, Anita Garey, Arlene Hanerfeld, Valerie Hans, Karen Hanson, Elizabeth Higginbotham, Michael Kimmel, Carole Marks, Joanne Nigg, Marian Palley, Claude Steele, Dorothy Steele, Ben Steiner, Howard Taylor, and Kathleen Tierney for thinking about women with me. I also thank Al Camarillo, George Frederickson, Hazel Marcus, Matt Snipp, and Bob Zajonc for their support during the time I was at the Stanford University Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity. Their work to advance scholarship on race and ethnicity is critically important in the ongoing transformation of educational thought and practices.

Several reviewers also provided detailed comments on the earlier edition. Their

suggestions were extremely helpful in developing the new edition. Thanks to: Christine Min Wotipka, Stanford University; Sharon K. Araj, University of Alaska; Nancy Wisely, Stephen F. Austin State University; Terri LeMoyné, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga.

Special thanks to Joel Best, my chair, for supporting my work and providing the environment that encourages us to do our best work. Vicki Baynes, Linda Keen, and Judy Watson also provided all sorts of help—including managing correspondence, keeping my computers from crashing, and paying some of the bills. They are a hardworking and dedicated group of women, and I appreciate all that they do. Thanks as well as to Anna Sanders for providing the research support that helped me get this done on time. She, too, is thinking about women and will be making her own contributions to this field in the years ahead. My students at the University of Delaware and Stanford University have also enriched this book with their thoughts and their questions. I have written this book with them in mind and hope that they know how much their curiosity inspires my thinking.

As with most projects, there are people “behind-the-scenes” without whom this book would not exist. I am particularly grateful to Dusty Friedman, my production editor, whose extraordinarily capable work has produced this and other of my books; it is a real pleasure to work with her and to have her as a friend. Jane Loftus has painstakingly read every word and punctuation mark in the new edition; I thank her for taking this project on, even while she was busy with other projects. I also thank Andrea Christie and Jeff Lasser at Allyn and Bacon for their support for the new edition.

And thank you to Richard Rosenfeld whose companionship and support make life fun—even when work takes away from our time together. I can’t think of a creative way to express the many different aspects of our life together, so this time, I’ll just say thank you with much love.



## About the Author

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*The Essentials* (Wadsworth, 2001; also coauthored with Howard F. Taylor), *Understanding Society: An Introductory Reader* (Wadsworth, 2001; coedited with Kim Logio and Howard F. Taylor), and *Social Problems* (Addison Wesley Longman, 1997; coauthored with Frank R. Scarpitti and Laura L. O'Toole). She is a recipient of the University of Delaware's Excellence-in-Teaching Award. She is the former president of the Eastern Sociological Society and has served on the Council of the American Sociological Association. She is a member of the National Advisory Board for the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University where she has been a Visiting Professor.



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# STUDYING WOMEN

## *Feminist Perspectives*



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The Sociological Imagination

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Defining Feminism

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Women's Studies and the Inclusion of Women

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*Phases of Curriculum Change*

*The Significance of Gender, Race, and Class*

*The Growth of Men's Studies*

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The Sociological Framework for Thinking about Women

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*Summary*

*Key Terms*

*Discussion Questions/Projects for Thought*

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*Suggested Readings*

Why think about women? According to much popular thinking, equity for women has been achieved. Formal barriers to discrimination have been removed. Women have moved into many of the top professional positions, are now the majority of college graduates, and are more visible in positions of power than at any other time in the nation's history. Over the past 25 years (the full life span of many of you reading this book), the position of women in U.S. society has changed dramatically. The majority of women are employed, and they now number close to half of those in the workplace.

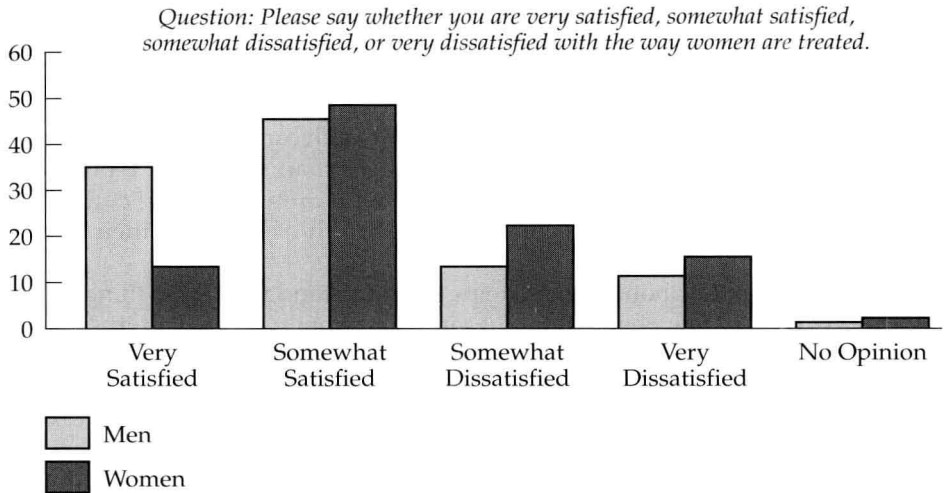
Attitudes have changed, too. The majority of young women now say they would prefer to combine marriage, children, and a career. Men have also changed. In the early 1970s, nearly half of all men thought that a traditional marriage—in which the husband provided for the family and the wife ran the house and cared for the children—would be the most satisfying lifestyle. Now, half of all men say the most satisfying lifestyle would be a marriage in which the husband and wife share responsibilities—work, housekeeping, and child care (Roper Organization, 1995).

These changes have led many to conclude that women now have it made, that as long as women and men choose a satisfying lifestyle, no further change is needed. Consider the following facts, however:

- Now, women college graduates who work full-time earn, on average, 74 percent of what men college graduates earn working full-time (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).
- Despite three decades of policy change to address gender inequality at work, women and minorities are still substantially blocked from senior management positions in most U.S. companies (Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995).
- Twenty-five percent of all households headed by women are poor; the rates are higher for African American women, Latinas, and Native American women (Dalaker, 2001).
- Each year, one-half million women are raped or sexually assaulted; three-quarters of these violent acts are committed by friends, acquaintances, or intimate partners (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000).
- Despite the fact that they are the most likely to be employed, women of color are concentrated in the least-paid, lowest-status jobs in the labor market (U.S. Department of Labor, 2001).
- Married women and men have increased the number of hours they work per year substantially since 1980—men by 4 percent, women by 42 percent (Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt, 2001).

These facts indicate that although women may have come a long way, there is still a long way to go. Little wonder that there is a substantial gender gap in women's and men's perception of society's treatment of women: Women are much more likely than men to perceive job discrimination based on gender (see Figure 1.1).

Look around, and you will see many signs of the status of women in society. In the grocery store, for example, women are clustered in those departments (deli and



**FIGURE 1.1 Perceptions of Society's Treatment of Women**

Source: Data from Lydia Saad. 2001. "Women See Room for Improvement in Job Equity." Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization. Website: [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com)

bakery) that are least likely to lead to promotion; men, on the other hand, predominate in departments such as produce and groceries, where the majority of store managers begin (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). In schools, women constitute a large majority of elementary school teachers, but through the higher grades and into college, women become a smaller proportion of the faculty. Despite the recent movement of more women into political office, the vast majority of those who make and enforce laws are men, particularly among those holding the most influential positions. Women can now be ordained in some religious faiths, but many still hold that women's proper place is in the home, reproducing and rearing children.

Even in interpersonal interaction, the difference in status between women and men can be observed. Watch the behavior of men and women around you—how they act with each other and with those of the same sex. In public places, men touch women more often than women touch men. Men also touch women in more places on the body than women touch men. Despite stereotypes to the contrary, men also talk more than women and interrupt women more than women interrupt men or men interrupt each other. Women are more likely than men to smile when interacting with others (especially with men), even when they are not necessarily happy. Men, in general, are less restricted in their demeanor than women and use more personal space. Although these patterns do not hold for all men and all women, nor necessarily for people from different cultural backgrounds, in general, they reflect the different ways that women and men have learned to interact (Basow, 1992).

Many current social problems also call attention to the status of women in society. Violence against women—in the form of rape, sexual harassment, incest, and wife beating—is common. Changes in U.S. families mean that more families are

headed by women. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with such arrangements, the low wages of many women mean that female-headed households have an increased chance of being poor. As a consequence, the rate of poverty among children in such households has increased dramatically in recent years. As a final example, the national controversy over health care also has particular implications for women. Although women live longer than men, they report more ill health than men do, spend their later years with more disabling conditions, and tend to take primary responsibility for the health of others in their families (Horton, 1995).

Thinking about women helps us understand why these things occur. For many years, very few people thought seriously about women. Patterns affecting the lives of women were taken for granted as natural or to be expected. Few people questioned the status of women in society, presuming instead that studying women was trivial, something done only by a radical fringe or by frivolous thinkers. Even now, studying women is often ridiculed or treated with contempt. For example, conservative talk-show hosts portray feminism as “leftist extremism,” “out of touch with the mainstream,” and “an attempt to transport unpopular liberalism into the mainstream society” (Limbaugh, 1992:186–187). Attacks on new multicultural studies, of which women’s studies has been a strong part, have accused such studies of only striving for “political correctness” and weakening the traditional “standards” of higher education. Despite these claims, women’s studies has opened new areas for questioning, has corrected many of the omissions and distortions of the past, and has generated new knowledge—much of which has important implications for social policy. Moreover, by bringing attention to the study of gender, studying women has also opened new ways to think about and study men. The analysis of men and masculinity is now an important part of gender studies.

**Women’s studies**, as a field of study, is relatively new, having been established in the late 1960s and early 1970s to correct the inattention given to women in most academic fields. Because of the influence of the feminist movement, scholars in most fields have begun thinking seriously about women. Whereas 25 years ago the study of women’s lives and gender relations had barely begun, now women’s studies is a thriving field of study. Studying women and men as gendered subjects has often required challenging some of the basic assumptions in existing knowledge—both in popular conceptions and in academic studies. Scholars have found that thinking about women changes how we think about human history and society, and it revises how social institutions are understood. Thinking about women also reveals deep patterns of gender relations in contemporary society. Much of the time, these patterns go unnoticed, but they influence us nonetheless. Often, we take these patterns of everyday life for granted. They are part of the social world that surrounds us and that influences who we are, what we think, and which opportunities are available to us. Women’s studies scholarship is transformative; it informs our understanding of women’s experiences and changes our thinking about society and the assumptions that different academic fields use to understand the social and cultural world.

The purpose of this book is twofold: to show how the sociological perspective explains women’s lives and the structure of gender in society, and to show how so-