

Feminist scholars have identified scientific knowledge as socially constructed through masculine imagery, thus distorting what is scientifically known.

Feminist standpoint theory suggests that the social location of “knower” shapes what is known, including in the sciences. This perspective suggests that only with the greater inclusion of those who have been excluded can objective scientific knowledge be created.

Key Terms

digital divide
epistemology
scientific method
self-esteem

self-fulfilling prophecy
sexual harassment
standpoint theory
stereotype threat

Title IX of the Educational
Amendments
tracking

Discussion Questions/Projects for Thought

1. Find out what the proportion of women is compared with men in your school, as well as the areas of study that each group pursues. Do you see evidence of gender segregation in education? If so, what explains it, and do you think this is changing over time?
2. Interview a group of young girls in elementary school, junior high school, and high school and ask about their interests in science and math. Do you see evidence of change in scientific interests over time? What do you think explains this?
3. Identify one of the other courses you are taking and examine the textbook to see where women are included and/or excluded. What does this tell you about the construction of knowledge in that field?

Women, Power, and Politics

DEFINING POWER

WOMEN AND THE STATE

WOMEN AND THE LAW

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CHAPTER SUMMARY AND THEMES

KEY TERMS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ PROJECTS FOR THOUGHT

For the first time in our nation's history, we are witnessing an extraordinary transformation of the place of women in the political system. Hillary Rodham Clinton, now Secretary of State and former First Lady, was a serious contender for the highest office in the land: the presidency. Sarah Palin, former governor of Alaska and vice presidential candidate in the 2008 election, has become a major political spokesperson for the Republican Party—and the conservative movement in the United States—a place once inhabited mostly by White men. Record numbers of women are serving in national office and in presidential appointments. More women serve in the U.S. Senate than at any time in history—17 of 100 (enough that as recently as 1992 the Senate had to be remodeled because there was no bathroom for women near the Senate floor!).

Yet, although women are reaching new heights of political power, old attitudes and stereotypes still remain. Think of how First Ladies are considered—the very role presuming a certain gender order. What if a woman were elected to the presidency? Would there be a First Man? What would his role be? And doesn't this presuppose that the highest position in the nation—indeed the world—must be a married, heterosexual man? First Ladies themselves are also subjected to particular gender expectations. They are widely adored when they adopt a traditional helpmate role—supporting their husband, staying in the background, and focusing on concerns traditionally thought of as in women's realm, such as children, health, and education.

This became even more complicated by race when First Lady Michelle Obama stepped into this role. She was completely dissected in the press—mostly for her well-toned arms. Media pundits raged on about whether it was “appropriate” for her to wear sleeveless dresses; her arms were scrutinized every which way—as if she were simply a body specimen, not an intelligent, well-educated, highly accomplished person. Would this have ever happened to someone of a different race or gender?

Contradictions abound and opposing movements define the contemporary place of women in politics. The juxtaposition of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin in the 2008 election and its aftermath could not make this clearer. Although both hold power and influence, what they support and what they represent could not be more divergent. Even the public reaction to each of them is moored in gendered beliefs that, whatever you think of Clinton's or Palin's political position, reflect a deep discomfort with outspoken women. Like all women in the political realm, they exist within a system of power and politics that is a deeply gendered institution.

Feminist scholars have shown how deeply gender influences political behavior, political attitudes, and the structure of political institutions. Gender shapes power and politics, although the dominant construction of gender in politics has been resisted and fought by the many women who have organized politically to create social change. The feminist movement has been one of the most powerful forces of social change in our times, and women have also been critical in the mobilization of other movements—the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, and antiwar movements. As you read about women, gender, and political behavior, you should keep this resistance in mind. It is evidence of the capacity of women—and men—to make change even in the face of what seems to be intractable.

DEFINING POWER

Power has traditionally been believed to be the province of men. Indeed, judging by some indicators, this has changed very little—just notice how few women are heads of state, particularly in the major world powers. Women, instead, are seen as exercising power primarily at home (a myth exposed by considering men's power in the family; see Chapter 6). Women have also been stereotyped as holding the “power behind the throne,” as if women's power comes primarily from their presumed manipulation of men and as if women's primary political role is to remain invisible and out of public view.

Power is the ability to influence others. Power comes in many forms. It can be exercised by individuals or groups and within and outside of formal social institutions. Power can come through persuasion, charisma, law, political activism, and coercion. It is not just an individual attribute, even though some individuals may be more powerful than others. Power in society comes as the result of a social process and social relationships; the use of power cannot be understood without reference to this social context. To explain further, although an individual may have characteristics that make him or her more powerful (i.e., the person's race, gender, age, religion, social class, education, etc.), it is the value that society has placed on these characteristics that gives the person power. Moreover, exercising power means people have to be situated such that they can mobilize the resources needed to influence others.

Consider men's power. Feminists describe men's power as a system of **patriarchy**, meaning an organized social structure whereby men as a group hold more power than women. Patriarchal societies give men power and authority over women; this can be institutional and/or individual. Societies will differ in exactly how patriarchal power is structured. For example, in a monarchy, an individual man (e.g., as a king or an emperor) may have ultimate power and authority. In a democratic society, power is determined through law and the various regulatory institutions that uphold and enforce the law. If men control the law-making process and the institutions that implement the law, however, they hold institutional power. In this sense, patriarchy becomes part of the structure of the society, even if power is not held by a single or particular man. In such a system, patriarchy structures the many social institutions that regulate and determine the nature of women's lives. In this sense, the United States is a patriarchal society.

Men's power does not stem from the mere fact of their being biologically male, nor does having institutions that are patriarchal mean that every individual man is powerful. Patriarchy in an institutional sense means that social institutions have been organized over time to give men more advantage than women (recognizing that this advantage is also influenced by other factors, such as one's social class, religion, race, etc.). It is the structural supports given to men's power that constitute the institutional basis of patriarchy.

To understand this, think about the subject of marital violence. Feminists explain men's violence against women as an expression of men's power, a power manifested in the actual marital relationship where violence occurs. Beyond the relationship between these two people, other institutions are organized to support

men's power. Women who turn to these institutions for help often find that the system does not work on their behalf. Understanding violence against women, then, is a matter of understanding both individual power relationships and institutional power relationships.

Power is not all one-sided, however. People can mobilize to challenge existing power arrangements in society, and individuals can work to create more egalitarian relationships. Power does not come only from within existing institutions. People can mobilize to alter the structural supports that give power to some groups and not others; thus, social movements and other forms of political action are means of challenging and transforming the status quo. Although the existing system may give certain power resources to certain groups, people can develop the resources to alter social institutions. Power can come through mobilization of vast numbers of people (such as in mass movements); through effective use of strategies such as boycotts, civil disobedience, and media campaigns; and through the exercise of law, including, if needed, legal reforms. These forms of political action can change the circumstances even of those considered to be the most powerless.

The women's movement, as an example, has mobilized women and men to make a number of changes that have altered the power that women hold both as a group and as individuals. Likewise, the civil rights movement involved the mass mobilization of African American people who were otherwise quite powerless—unable to vote, unable to use public accommodations, and without access to the best educational institutions. And the mobilization of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people has brought a new consciousness to the need for changes in social policy to extend full civil rights to people regardless of their sexual orientation. These political movements have altered the power base of gender, race, and sexuality in the United States.

We can also distinguish the concepts of power and authority. **Authority** is power that is perceived by others as legitimate and that is structured into specific social institutions. Authority comes not just because a person or group exercises power, but because their constituents believe their power is legitimate and because there are institutional supports in place that make this authority legitimate. The recognition of authority varies across societies, depending on the structure of that society. In a monarchy, for example, the king or queen has authority over all matters; in a totalitarian society, the dictator or emperor has total authority over all affairs. In a democratic society based on the rule of law, the law serves as the system of authority, with those who interpret and execute it as the primary agents of authority. One of the further consequences of patriarchy is the tendency to see men and men's activities as more authoritative in the areas deemed to be most important.



WOMEN AND THE STATE

The institution that embodies the official power system is the *state*. The term **state** refers to the organized system of power and authority in society. This is different from the ordinary meaning of the term as a geographic area (e.g., California, Missouri, or Georgia). As a concept, the *state* refers to all of the institutions that represent official power and authority in society. The state regulates many societal

relations, ranging from individual behavior and interpersonal conflicts to international affairs. Different institutions make up the state, including formal systems of government, the military, the courts, and the law.

Feminist thinking about the state begins from the premise that an analysis of gender is critical to understanding the state. Feminists see the state as a *gendered institution*—that is, an institution that embeds within it the characteristics associated with a particular gender. Feminists conceive of the state as embodying the masculine characteristics of presumed rationality, detachment, power, forcefulness, and impersonality. As one of the most bureaucratic of all institutions, the state operates as if it were neutral, when, in fact, according to feminists, it is organized on quite gender-specific grounds. Not surprisingly, then, some of the specific institutions composing the state (e.g., the military and the police) are the most masculine (in the cultural sense) and male-dominated of all social institutions.

Because the state represents the imposition of power and authority in society, it is characterized by feminists as representing men's interests more than women's. Furthermore, it is an imposing force in many women's lives. Poor women who receive public assistance, for example, have the state intruding in their affairs more than happens for women with more class privilege. The state may regulate how one lives, whether one is forced to work, how one cares for children, and what kind of health care is available. For all women, the state is also a source for laws that govern many features of everyday life, ranging from reproductive rights to rights to work and rights for equal protection.

Two primary theoretical models have been used by social scientists to explain how the state operates. The first, the **pluralism** model, sees the state as representing the plural interests of different groups in society. According to this model, the state tries to balance the different interest groups in society. *Interest groups* are those that are organized around a specific cause or purpose, such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Planned Parenthood, and the National Organization for Women (NOW). This model interprets the state as representing the diverse interest groups in society. These groups mobilize to achieve political results and use their influence to achieve their political ends.

The other model of the state is known as the **power elite**. According to this perspective, a powerful ruling class controls the actions of the state. The power elite consists of those who hold power in the economy, the executive branch of the government, and the military. Elites in these institutions share common interests and shape the political agendas in the society. Because this powerful group is primarily men, the power elite model represents men's interests as shaping the major decisions in society. This model also sees a strong alliance between government and corporate business, since the power elite, through their role in government, shape decisions that protect the interests of big business. The power elite model sees the state as part of the structure of domination in society, including gender domination, racial domination, and class domination.

Feminists have supplemented these models of state theory with the argument that the state essentially reflects men's interests, not only because men are those most likely to be in the power elite but also because men control most of the major interest groups that influence the workings of the state. Feminist theory sees the state as

fundamentally patriarchal—that is, representing the power of men over women. Some have concluded that despite the presence of some women in positions of authority in the state, on the whole, the state promotes men's interests. As Catharine MacKinnon, a noted feminist legal scholar, puts it, "the state is male" (1983:644). The argument that "the state is male" can be vividly seen if you just visualize the nation's leadership. Although women are increasingly present in highly visible positions, men are hardly represented in proportion to their presence in the population.

Ironically, although some feminists analyze the state as essentially oppressive to women because the state represents men's interests, feminists also see the state as the only institution to which disadvantaged groups can turn for redress. Both the women's movement and the civil rights movement have used state power to enforce existing laws or to work to change the law. While the state can (and does) support gender inequality—for example, by denying women the right to vote or, as was the case in the early history of this country, denying women the right to speak in public—the state is also the institution that guarantees women equal protection under the law. Legislation that has brought women civil rights, defined sexual harassment as illegal, and provided some degree of reproductive freedom has been developed through the state. It is important to point out, however, that this state action has come only as the result of political mobilization by feminist groups.

WOMEN AND THE LAW

Law is the written system through which state authority is defined; thus, the study of law is extremely significant in feminist analysis. Like the state, the law is both a source for the denial of women's rights and one of the avenues to which feminists have turned to address the problems of women's inequality. Significant scholarship in women's studies has developed both to describe the changes in law that have stemmed from the women's movement and to understand the process by which the law has encoded men's interests. Feminist legal scholars have also developed the analysis of feminist jurisprudence—that is, they have developed studies of law that interpret the law as reflecting men's power but that try to revise legal doctrine to be consistent with feminist theory and practice. These studies have shown that although the law is a significant source of change for women, it is also limited in its ability to transform women's lives (Baer 1998; Crenshaw et al. 1996).

Since the 1960s, women's position relative to the law has changed dramatically. Whereas historically the law officially excluded women from full citizenship, now the law has taken a neutral position on gender. Early on, there was no protection for those women who departed from traditional roles in family. Laws overtly prohibited women from entering certain professions and treated men and women differently at every level. The **Equal Pay Act of 1963**, which required equal pay for equal work, was the first law to begin breaking this discriminatory framework. Strengthened by the **Civil Rights Bill of 1964** and subsequent pieces of legislation, the law now, at least in theory, gives women equal civil rights to men.

As they are written, laws provide some basis for the equal treatment of men and women before the law. How the law is interpreted and implemented, however,

may be another matter. Even with an equal rights framework in place, executing the law is a function of many sociological factors, including how police, lawyers, and judges interpret and execute the law and how the legal system is structured to give legal advantage to some groups and not others.

On the first point, feminists have pointed out that women are underrepresented among those who are responsible for interpreting and exercising the law. As lawyers, women have dramatically increased their representation in recent years, now comprising 34 percent of lawyers. Women lawyers are more likely to practice some areas of law than others, and although they are more widely distributed across legal specialties than in the past, the largest percentage of women lawyers are found in family and public service law (Commission of Women in the Profession 2010). Women are 44 percent of judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers—a seemingly large percent, but most of these are in small jurisdictions. Women are 26 percent of state court judges (National Association of Women Judges 2010).

Do women judges matter? Some think that women would bring a unique perspective to the bench as a result of their presumably different gender perspective (Coontz 2000). The evidence is mixed. While some studies actually find that women impose harsher sentences on criminal defendants and are generally more liberal (Steffensmeier and Hebert 1999; Songer and Crews-Meyer 2000), other research finds that gender of the judge is less important than such things as severity of the offense, the victim's gender and age, and the defendant's prior record (Bogoch 1999b; Neilson 2002). Women judges are less likely to support death penalty verdicts, and their presence on the bench also seems to influence male judges not to support death penalty verdicts (Songer and Crews-Meyer 2000). Where women judges seem to make a great difference is in cases involving gender equality and battering and abuse (Martin et al. 2002). Studies find that judges now, regardless of their gender, are less likely to blame battered women for their own abuse, indicative of some of the progress made by the women's movement in the realm of judicial reasoning (Cassidy and Trafimow 2002). The rationale that women should serve on the bench because they bring a different perspective to the administration of justice may not hold up, but it is certainly the case that a judiciary that does not itself represent gender equality is suspect in a democratic society (Malleon 2003).

Feminist critiques of the law have asked whether the law is really neutral as it is intended to be—or does it only encode the power of men, at least in how it is practiced and interpreted. This is a complex question, particularly for a society where the rule of law is a primary social value. Under the U.S. Constitution, citizens have "equal protection" of the law and this concept has been the basis for many of the nation's most progressive changes with regard to extending civil rights to diverse groups. But there is also tension within the execution of law because legal institutions, like other social institutions, continue to reflect systemic structures of gender, race, and class inequality.

Given these institutional realities, another question is: Are equal rights enough? As you will see in Chapter 12 on liberal feminism, many feminists take the position that creating equal rights for women is the best strategy for social change. Others argue that this strategy does not recognize the unique life experiences of women. For example, should women be given special treatment before

the law for pregnancy and maternity? This is a source of debate. Some feminists, for instance, have been opposed to protective legislation that has excluded pregnant women from certain occupations (see Chapter 7). Under current law, maternity has no special place; it is defined as a disability. Is this an adequate framework for the legal protection of pregnant women? More radical feminists have argued that the presumed neutrality of the law is problematic for women, because the law protects men's power under the guise of legal neutrality.

As an example, consider rape law. Most state laws define rape as occurring only when penetration has taken place—a definition that feminists would argue takes a phallogocentric position, as if sexual intercourse has only taken place when a man inserts himself (or an object) into a woman. Despite changes in the law that make it illegal to bring up a woman's past sexual history in a rape trial ("rape shield laws"), in reality, women are still sexualized during rape trials; men are not. In rape cases, the law also makes consent the crux of whether the assailant is guilty, thereby making most rape trials as much a trial for the victim as for the rapist. In a society where women are defined as sexual objects, any number of factors can influence whether consent is perceived by the police, the defense attorney, the judge, or the jury. A woman is easily discredited on the issue of consent, particularly if she had been drinking or was under the influence of drugs at the time of the assault or if she had any prior relationship (including marriage) with the assailant. What the woman was wearing, where she was walking, how she earns her income, and any number of other factors influence people's judgments about consent.

What if a different standard existed in the law and a woman's consent was not the most significant issue? For example, how would rape laws and trials be different if men's dominance was the major point to prove? This is the kind of thinking that feminist scholars consider when they argue that the law, presumably neutral, is masculinist in its very framework.

Finally, feminists also argue that the legal method reflects masculinist culture. Legal interrogation is adversarial, based on rational argument, outdoing one's opponent, and arguing minute details. Think again of a rape trial; the method of interrogation is so masculine that rape victims report that the trial feels like a repetition of the rape. Some feminists have concluded that the legal method—debate and argument—is a masculine mode of thinking and acting. The reliance on former precedent and case law also replicates gender inequities, because this reliance gives weight to tradition without looking at the gendered context in which that tradition was constructed.

In sum, feminist studies of the law have both analyzed the legal reforms that have produced more equity for women and, as well, have criticized the gendered basis of the law. As you will see in the chapters to come, different theoretical and political positions underlie feminist arguments and form a substantive debate around the use of the law as a framework for liberating social change for women.



WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT

One way to change women's standing before the law is to increase the number of women who are lawmakers; thus, one of the major feminist political strategies in recent years has been to expand the number of women serving in public political

office. In the past, women were explicitly barred from political office. In the early history of the nation, political rights were based on birth, property, race, age, and religion. Basic political rights that have defined this nation as democratic were not originally extended to women; women were denied rights to free speech and property and the right to assemble. They were effectively excluded from participating—not just as political officials, but in sharing the same political rights as White men. When the American Revolution gave universal suffrage to White men, women were officially denied the right to vote (Darcy et al. 1994).

With this history behind us, feminists now ask why there are still so few women elected to political office in the United States. Compared with most other democratic, industrialized nations, women in the United States are an amazingly small number of elected officials (see Figure 11.1), although women's representation in government has been increasing (see Figure 11.2, page 334). The number of women in the U.S. House of Representatives reached an all-time high in 2009

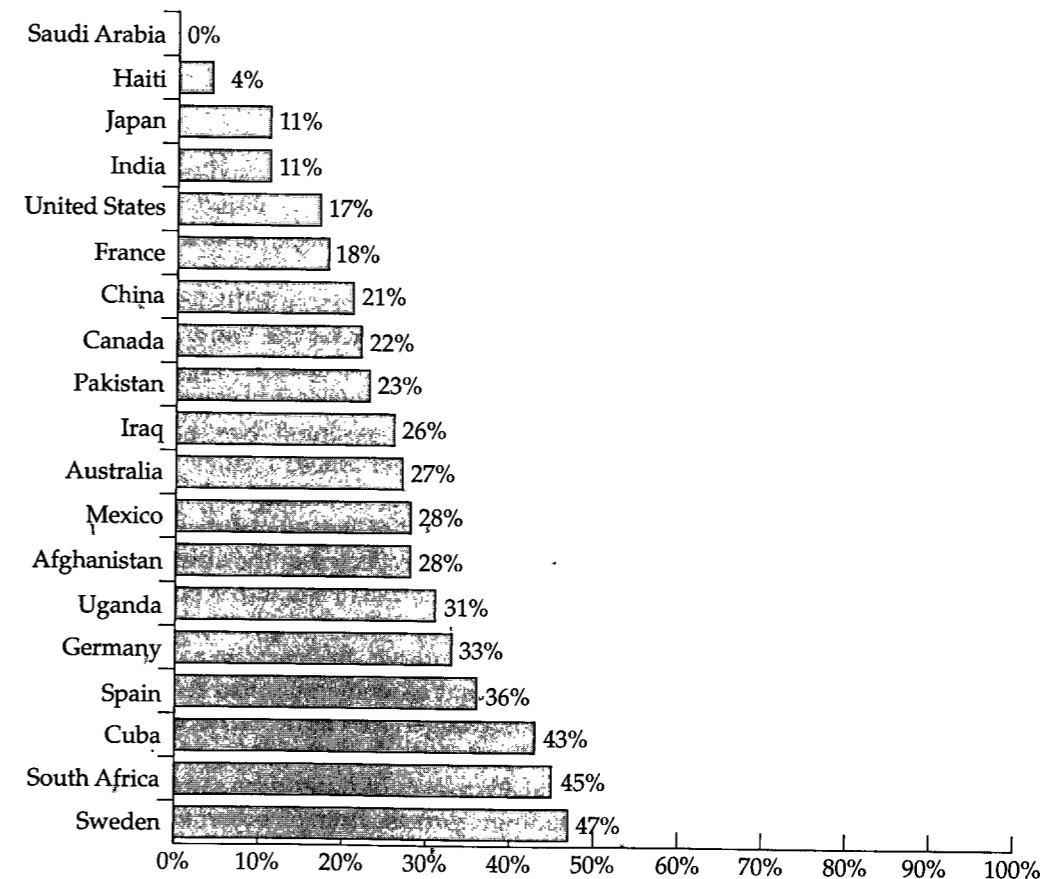


FIGURE 11.1 Women's Representation in Selected National Legislatures

Source: United Nations. 2009. *Statistics and Indicators on Women and Men*. <http://unstats.un.org>.

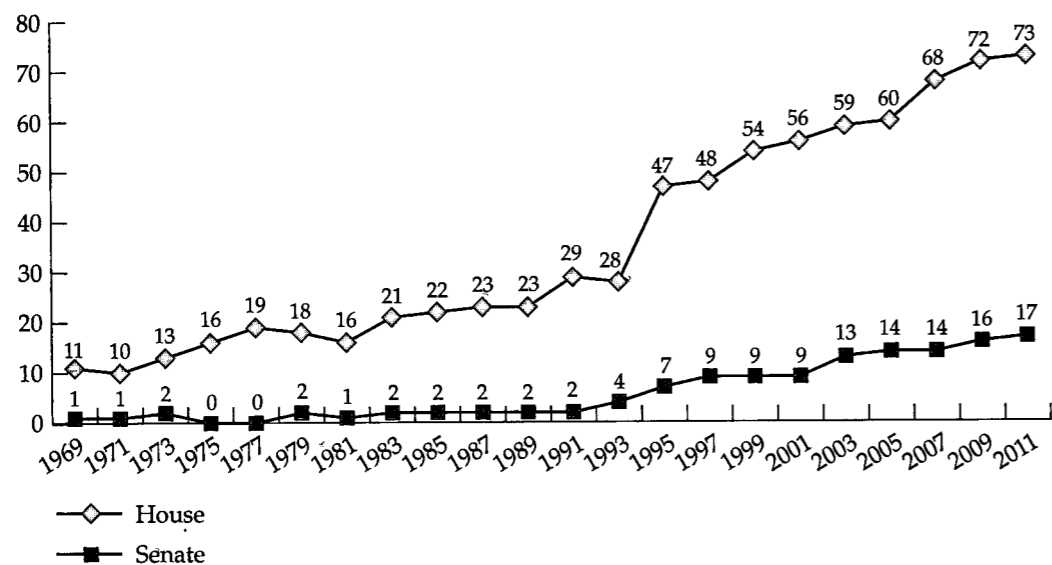


FIGURE 11.2 Women in the U.S. Congress

Sources: Congressional Research Service. 2010. www.opencrs.com

(73 women of 435 members); 17 women (the historic high) serve in the Senate. Yet, women are still a small portion of the total.

Women fare somewhat better in statewide offices; in 2010, 23 percent of state legislators and six governors were women (Center for the Women and American Politics 2010). This means that matters of greatest national importance are still determined mostly by men. Since holding a state office is also typically a route to mobility in the political system, being underrepresented there has consequences for women's likelihood of being elected to higher office.

Why are so few women elected officials? Research offers a number of possible answers. One explanation is that sheer prejudice has taught people to think that women are not well suited to politics. This is reflected in the attitude that women do not have the personality characteristics that suit them for politics. Although only a small minority of people in the United States explicitly believes this, the attitude persists in some people's minds.

Some 20 percent of men and 14 percent of women say that the country would be governed worse if women were in charge (see Figure 11.3). Still, attitudes are changing. Young people are especially likely to think there would be benefits from electing more women to office. And 86 percent of Americans say they would vote for a woman if she were nominated—an increase from 66 percent in 1971 and only 33 percent in 1937 when the question was first asked in a national survey (Jones and Moore 2003; Jones 2005).

A second explanation of the small number of women in politics is that gender-stereotyped socialization does not encourage women to see themselves as potential political candidates. A large number of people think that women do not enter

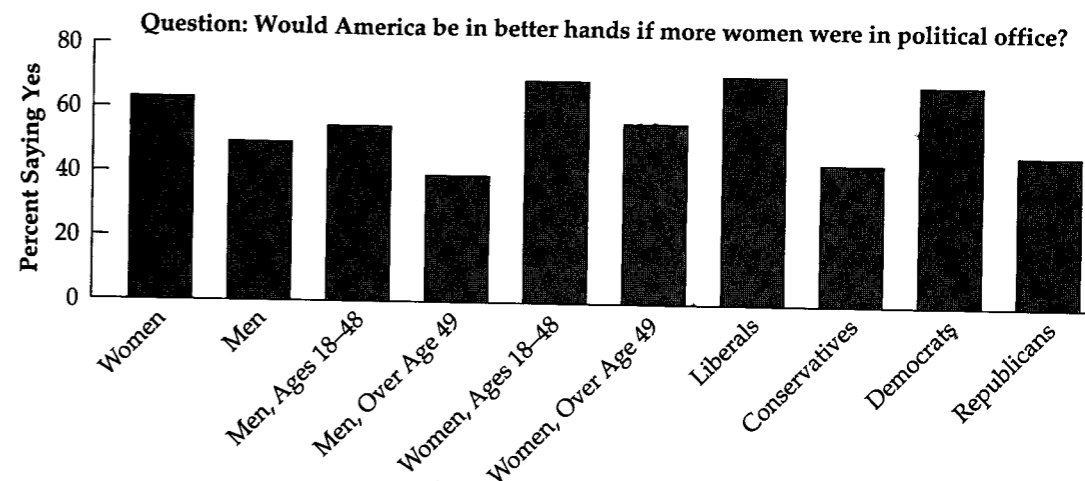


FIGURE 11.3 Women in Politics: Public Attitudes

Source: Data from Wendy Simmons. 2001. "Majority of Americans Say More Women in Political Office Would Be Positive for the Country." Princeton, NJ: The Gallup Organization. www.gallup.com. Reprinted with permission.

politics because, as girls growing up, they are not encouraged to do so. One-third of the public still think that men are emotionally better suited for politics than most women (General Social Survey 2004).

Explaining women's underrepresentation in politics as a matter of prejudice and socialization, however, does not expose the institutional forces that discourage women's greater political participation. Being successful in politics requires, among other things, having the support of party leaders. If those leaders do not encourage women to run for office, there is little likelihood of women's success as politicians. Other institutional factors also influence women's likelihood of winning political office. Being an incumbent, regardless of one's gender, carries a huge advantage in political elections. As new entrants to politics, women are at a disadvantage in challenging those who already hold office.

One of the ways that people succeed in politics, as in other high-level careers, is through the use of social and political networks. These networks are important resources for people in positions of influence because they provide systems of support for information, communication, and acquaintances where associates can be counted on for help. In any high-level job, networks are critical. Women, however, tend to have less extensive networks than do men and to be isolated from the male-centered networks where the most power lies. Because of this, many political women have organized their own networks, such as the Congressional Women's Caucus, as a way of providing support and networking to women in office.

Campaign financing is another area where women are at a structural disadvantage relative to men. Political campaigns are notoriously expensive. Women, who as a group have lower incomes than men and fewer economic resources, are not likely to have the financial resources necessary to mount expensive political campaigns. One way that women have organized to counter this disadvantage

is through groups such as Emily's List. Emily is an acronym for "Early Money Is Like Yeast." Begun in 1985, Emily's List is a national organization whose purpose is to raise funds that are used to support women's election campaigns. Emily's List is the largest fundraiser for Democratic candidates. Other groups are now engaging in similar fundraising efforts on women's behalf, including Sisters United, a New Jersey organization that supports Black Democratic women.

Finally, women's dual roles in work and the family may put them at a disadvantage in running for political office. As long as women hold the primary responsibility



MEDIA MATTERS

Media Coverage of First Ladies

Historically, the traditional roles of the First Lady have consisted primarily of host or escort, but in recent years, several First Ladies have taken more active roles in leadership and decision making. Has media coverage of First Ladies changed with their increased visibility?

Erica Scharrer and Kim Bissell examined media coverage of three First Ladies: Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Hillary Clinton. In study 1, Scharrer and Bissell conducted a content analysis of newspaper stories in *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. They analyzed a total of 371 stories that were collected from both newspapers during the first two years in which each woman was First Lady. In study 2, Scharrer and Bissell analyzed the photographic content of *Time* magazine's coverage of Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Hillary Clinton. They limited their examination of each First Lady to the first term of her husband's presidency. In total, they analyzed 176 photographs from 312 issues of *Time*.

Results from study 1 indicated there was a more "negative tone" in news stories about First Ladies when they were more active in political activity. Also, the news coverage of Hillary Clinton was notably different from the news coverage of both Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush because, Scharrer and Bissell contend, Hillary Clinton, a vocal proponent for health-care reform, was the most politically active.

In study 2, Scharrer and Bissell found that, in general, the First Lady is most often photographed in nonpolitical activities. Barbara Bush and Nancy Reagan were rarely photographed in politically active scenarios (5 percent and 3 percent of the

photographs, respectively), whereas Hillary Clinton was photographed in a politically active setting in 31 percent of her total coverage. Photographs that Scharrer and Bissell coded as nonpolitically active ($N = 145$) portrayed the First Lady in more stereotypical ways compared to photographs coded as politically active ($N = 31$). For example, in nonpolitically active photographs, First Ladies were engaged in "traditional" activities for First Ladies—they were shown entertaining guests: spending time with children, the elderly, or the ill; and greeting other politicians. As Scharrer and Bissell anticipated, because of her greater involvement in political activities, Hillary Clinton was photographed far less stereotypically than either Barbara Bush or Nancy Reagan.

Scharrer and Bissell's findings suggest that First Ladies must walk a fine line in their pursuit of political endeavors. They have the double task of conforming not only to their roles as women but also to their roles as spouses to the president as well.

Thinking Further: Scharrer and Bissell's research was done before Michelle Obama became First Lady of the United States. If you were replicating their study, but adding Michelle Obama to the research design, what questions would you ask? What do you see when you systematically examine media coverage of Michelle Obama, compared with these three White women?

Source: Based on Scharrer, Erica, and Kim Bissell. 2000. "Overcoming Traditional Boundaries: The Role of Political Activity in Media Coverage of First Ladies." *Women & Politics* 21: 55–83.

for family care, it is difficult for them to meet the time and energy requirements of political office. Numerous studies have shown that women's family obligations, including the availability of child care, interfere with their ability to take on political jobs. Despite the structural barriers to women's increased role in politics, women are making numerous inroads to political power. Their increased representation in formal government is partially the result of a concerted effort by many groups to increase women's political power in formal political systems. Without such political activism on behalf of more women in politics, one wonders if there would have been much change at all.

The Gender Gap

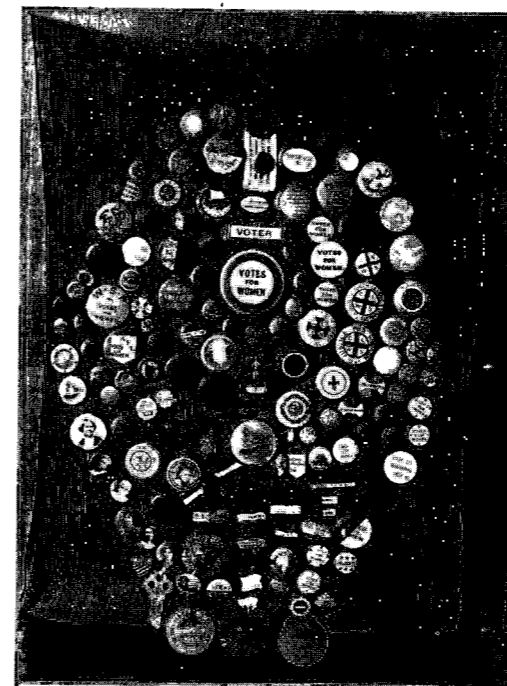
Studying women and politics is not just a matter of studying women as elected officials. Gender is also a major social factor influencing political attitudes and behavior. The term **gender gap** refers to the differences in women's and men's political behavior and political attitudes. One indication of the gender gap is that women are more likely than men to hold and support liberal views—and to identify and vote as Democrats. The development of the gender gap is a recent phenomenon, however. For many decades, men were more likely to vote than women, and, when asked, women reported voting the same as their husbands or fathers. Now, this trend is reversing. Women are also more likely than men to vote for Democratic candidates.

Black men and women voters overwhelmingly vote for Democratic candidates.

Women are now equally likely to vote as men do, but there are significant differences between their political outlooks. The gender gap is widest on issues involving violence and the use of force. Women, for example, are more likely than men to be peace-seeking and to support gun control. The gender gap is also evident on so-called compassion issues. Women are more likely to support government spending for social service programs, and they are more liberal on issues such as abortion, gay and lesbian rights, and women's rights.

Do Women Make a Difference?

Some argue that women's increased representation in government will bring a more compassionate view to politics. Gender differences between women and men suggest that women might bring different interests and different values to their work as elected officials. Do women have a different view? Does their participation in politics differ from that of men?



Women are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates than are men and tend to be more liberal on social issues.

Research on women politicians indicates that they tend to be most active in areas traditionally associated with women, including education, health, and welfare. In general, women are also more liberal and more feminist than their male counterparts, even controlling for political party and age. On a variety of issues, women differ from men—for example, in being less likely to support the death penalty, not trusting the private sector to solve economic problems, and opposing laws requiring parental consent for minors to have an abortion. Women are also more likely than before to make women's issues a priority. In public opinion polls, women are more pacifist than men, and they hold less militaristic values. Some feminists argue that women's traditional roles as mothers and caregivers produce these different value systems. Carol Gilligan's work on women's moral values, for example, suggests that women have different moral values than men and make value judgments by different sets of criteria—using an ethic of caring rather than absolute judgments about moral right and wrong, which is more characteristic of men (Gilligan 1982).

These contrasts suggest that women will make a difference as they move further into the political area. Some feminists caution us about such an expectation, however, claiming that arguments about women's different ways of being are based in **essentialism**—in other words, there are basic differences between women and men. Although those who argue that women are different recognize the socially constructed nature of these differences, their critics argue that some too easily base women's differences from men in their reproductive roles and their psychosexual makeup. This ignores how women's distinctive consciousness is shaped by history and the specific politics of race, class, and gender that create diverse experiences for different groups of women.

Those who claim that there are basic differences between women and men tend to ignore or understate differences among women. Critics of the essentialist position suggest that the gender gap in women's attitudes and behaviors may be explained by other factors. For example, some of the largest differences in political opinion are those between middle-class and working-class women; because middle-class women are more likely to get elected to political office, this may confound some of the research results purporting to find a gender gap.

The fact is that having such a small number of women in elected office makes it difficult to tell if their presence makes a difference in political outcomes, because they are typically a numerical minority and can be treated like tokens. If the number of women in office truly represented women's proportion in the population, perhaps there would be a big difference in political agendas, but we also have to be cautious about using gender stereotypes to assume that women will inevitably be different from men once they enter dominant social institutions.

WOMEN AND THE MILITARY

Women now serve in all branches of the military, and some have made it to the very top ranks of military service. Still, it was only as recently as 1996 when the U.S. Supreme Court (in *United States v. Virginia*) ruled that women could not be excluded from state-supported military academies. This case involved The Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), which had excluded women from

admissions based on arguments that women were unfit for the required and rigorous physical training that the institutions required. The Supreme Court disagreed, saying that women were protected under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Kimmel 2000).

There are now over 200,000 women in active military duty, including serving as soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as other parts of the world. A substantial number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq are also women, in part because the front line in this war could be anywhere (Wertheimer 2005). It was only in 1976 that women were first allowed into any of the military academies. Since then, there have been profound changes in the presence of women in the military. The percentage of women has increased from a mere 1.6 percent in 1973 to 14 percent in 2009. There are an additional 191,000 women in the reserves. Women, however, are underrepresented as military officers; 15 percent of officers are women, even though, in general, women in the military are better educated than their male counterparts. Nearly all women (99.8 percent) in the military are high school graduates (not much different from men, 98 percent of whom are high school graduates), but women are more likely than men to have attended college—27 percent of women versus 21 percent of men (Women's Education and Research Institute 2007).

In the past, the exclusion of women from full participation in the military, especially combat, has been justified by the belief that women need protection by men and that they can best carry out their womanly duties as mothers and wives. The fear among many that women might have to serve in combat was one of the major ideological reasons for defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. Despite these public reservations, women are actively serving in combat-related roles in the military. The Defense Authorization Act of 1992 also allows women to fly combat aircraft, traditionally an option only for men. Sixty-seven percent of the public now think women should be allowed into combat jobs (Gallup Poll 2009). Currently, women are technically barred by law from direct combat in the military, but as the nature of



Women are an increasing presence in the military.

"combat" has changed, this is becoming less meaningful. Many other nations have rescinded their laws and now restrict women from combat, though. Israeli women, like Israeli men, are subject to military conscription and are assigned to combat units; however, if the unit is deployed on a combat mission, the women are evacuated. The only NATO countries to exclude women from the military are Italy and Spain.

Gender relations in the military extend beyond looking at women who serve in the military. The experience of military wives, for example, is greatly affected by their husbands' employment as soldiers. Frequent moving means that military wives are less competitive in the labor market. And the presence of a military base in a given area seems to depress women's wages in the area (Booth 2003; Booth et al. 2000). At the same time, wives of military officers are expected not to pursue their own careers or risk their husbands' promotion (Harrell 2001).



A CLOSER LOOK AT MEN

Physical Training and "Equality" in the Military

Public debates for and against women in the military are ongoing and numerous. One area of contention that is often used as evidence that "women can't cut it in the military" is the physical training involved. Public opinion centers on fairness: If women want to enjoy full equality in the military, then they should have to meet the same training requirements as men in the military. Unfortunately, public opinion tells us very little about how men in the military frame their feelings about the issue.

Carol Cohn conducted over 80 interviews with male and female military personnel. Her sample was diverse in terms of race as well as military rank. Most of her sample was drawn from the Army and Air Force, with a few representatives from the Marines and Navy.

The men that Cohn interviewed differed in their level of enthusiasm regarding women in the military: Some of the men were quite supportive of the inclusion of women, and other men were quite opposed. Cohn found that men's negative feelings about women in the military were framed most frequently in terms of the unfairness of having different standards for physical training (PT) for men and women. Cohn calls this the "PT protest."

According to Cohn, some men used the PT protest as a way of reasserting gender differences

and implying that women are inferior to men. For example, when female military personnel shared stories of excelling at their PT tests with male peers, the men often responded by saying that the military's physical standards were not set very high for women.

Additionally, some men used the PT protest as a socially acceptable way of expressing resentment about women's expanding role in the military. Although a relationship between leadership potential and upper body strength has yet to be discovered, men expressed resentment toward women who were securing leadership roles in the military without necessarily "proving" (i.e., women are not required to do as many push-ups as men) that they belonged there.

It is important to reiterate that not all of the men in Cohn's study were opposed to women's inclusion in the military. Men's opposition to women in the military is complex and multifaceted. Therefore, Cohn concludes that simply requiring equal physical training standards for military men and women will not overcome men's resistance.

Source: Based on Cohn, Carol. 2000. "How Can She Claim Equal Rights When She Doesn't Have to Do as Many Push-Ups as I Do? The Framing of Men's Opposition to Women's Equality in the Military." *Men and Masculinities* 3 (October): 131-151.

Lesbians and Gays in the Military

Prejudices against women in the military pale beside the related prejudices that characterize gay and lesbian experiences in the military. There has been a long-standing policy to exclude gays and lesbians from the military, although gays and lesbians have made significant contributions to the nation's armed forces. Until recently, they have had to remain deeply closeted, however, including under the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, adopted by the Clinton administration, and now being debated. According to this policy, recruiting officers may not ask about sexual preference, and individuals should not reveal their sexual preference; those who reveal that they are gay or lesbian could be excluded from military service, based on their sexual orientation. Although this policy did not allow the explicit discharge of individuals because of being gay, it restricted the civil rights of gays and lesbians. At this time, it remains to be seen if the policy will be overturned.

Those who oppose the inclusion of gay men and lesbians in the military argue, among other things, that their presence affects the morale of the troops, making the military less effective. Opponents seem to assume that gays and lesbians cannot control their sexuality when living so close to members of the same sex. Their assumption is that gays and lesbians are out to convert all others to their lifestyle. Fear and misunderstanding about AIDS has fueled these homophobic ideas (Belkin and Bateman 2003).

Ironically, there seems to be more cause for worry about sexual harassment, in general, in the military—particularly the harassment of heterosexual men toward military women. Various scandals and the exposure of widespread sexual harassment in the military have exposed this issue before the public. Unlike the homophobic arguments that gays should be excluded from the military because they cannot control their sexuality and might affect military morale, no one has argued that heterosexual men should be excluded. Indeed, a culture of masculinity permeates the military, making sexual harassment a systemic problem (Firestone and Harris 2003).

Ideas like those being used to exclude gays and lesbians from the military were also used earlier in history to exclude African Americans from military service. Opponents of desegregating the armed services argued that it would lower military morale and that it would be difficult for Whites and Blacks to live together in close quarters. In fact, when President Truman ordered the racial desegregation of the military by executive order in 1948, he showed that these arguments were not true. Although racial integration in the military has not been fully achieved, the military is one of the most desegregated institutions in the nation.

Feminism and Militarism

Feminists have criticized the military not just for its discriminatory treatment against women and gays and lesbians, but also for the masculine character of the institution as a whole. Earlier, the concept of a *gendered institution* was discussed—a gendered institution being one that embodies the characteristics of a specific gender. The military is a perfect example of a gendered institution in that it is characterized as a most masculine institution, one emphasizing hierarchy, force, violence, and aggression (Connell 1992). This can be seen in a variety of ways.

First, national involvement in war and military aggression is often justified in terms of a nation being “tough,” “supreme,” and “heroic”—all characteristics associated with men’s gender role. Numerous examples throughout history also show how military propaganda uses images of threatened manhood to rationalize a nation’s engagement in war. Aggression and the capacity for violence are seen as indicating national strength, just as they are seen as indicating the strength of individual men. Although men’s violence occurs in day-to-day interactions, in its most escalated form it results in war and terrorism.

Second, militaristic values also legitimate much violence and sexual aggression against women, especially that which accompanies war and military occupation. The large-scale rape of women by invading armies in the war-torn Sudan is an example of how military conquerors tend to see sexual violation of women as their right following a military victory. Rape is common in war, as is the widespread use of women sex workers in brothels and as prostitutes in occupied territories and war zones (Enloe 1989).

But you do not have to look abroad to see the extent of violence against women within military institutions. A study released in 2008 by the military itself found that fully one-third of women in the military (and 6 percent of men) say they have been sexually harassed while serving. In addition, the same report found over 2,600 cases of sexual assault against women in the military in the same year, an average of 1.8 per 1,000 military members. In addition, studies of sexual assault and harassment have also focused on the military academies, where 15 percent of women in the academies report that they have been sexually harassed. Although the military academies have rates of sexual assault that are comparable (or even slightly lower) to those on other college campuses, sexual harassment is a serious and ongoing problem on military campuses. The military has responded to these problems by establishing reporting procedures as well as services for victims of sexual assault and harassment. It has also established a task force for ongoing accountability and has developed policies and procedures to combat sexual violence (National Women’s Law Center 2008; U.S. Department of Defense 2008). But the very presence of this problem within military institutions indicates the harm done to women through the link between militarism and exaggerated forms of masculine control. The strong association between militarism and masculinity is also evident in military training practices where homophobic socialization forces military recruits to be tough, aggressive, and strong as a way of proving their masculine heterosexuality. Those who are perceived as weak are labeled as “faggots” is one way that military recruits are initiated into military roles.



RETHINKING THE POLITICAL

Reviewing the workings of state institutions—including courts and the law, government, and the military—raises many new questions for feminist analysis. One of the primary questions to have emerged from feminist studies in this area is a rethinking of what *political* means. When most people think of something political, they likely think in terms of election politics and the workings of official government. In this sense, political behavior is only that which occurs within public political institutions. Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have defined the term

political more broadly and have argued that traditional concepts of the political have been marked by an incorrect conceptual dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life. Assuming that political behavior only occurs in the formal, public sphere overlooks significant political activity by women in other spheres, such as volunteer work in communities. A narrow understanding of what is political that includes only what occurs in the formal, public sphere limits our understanding of political behavior and restricts our understanding of political behavior to places where men have predominated. In addition, feminist scholars argue that the conceptual separation of the public and private spheres leads to oversight of how the public and private spheres intersect, as, for example, in understanding how women’s work in the private sphere supports public institutions, even when that work is devalued and ignored.

Redefining the political to include a broader spectrum of behavior encourages thinking of political behavior in new ways. Women’s community activism is one such area that has long been overlooked by those studying politics, but which, on closer look, reveals the many ways that women engage in political behavior. As examples, Gilkes (1980) has shown how African American women who have careers as community workers use their work both to help their communities in everyday survival and to transform social institutions. Although these women are seldom recognized as “political women,” their work in social service organizations, on the boards of local organizations, and as directors of agencies has important political ramifications for the African American community. Their political work stems not from their activity in dominant institutions but from their commitments to change and their mobilization of resources in service to the Black community. In a similar vein, Naples (1992) has studied low-income Latina and African American mothers, finding that they see their community work as stemming from their desire to improve the lives of their families and neighbors, the specific problems around which they organize include health care, housing, crime and safety, and sanitation. As activist mothers, their political action is part of the continuum of their care work.

These are but two examples of how women engage in political action, but from the grassroots (that is, the local level). This gives political activism a different meaning from that which is associated with mainstream politics. In both cases, the distinction between women’s private work in their families and communities is blurred with their public work as political actors.

Although women’s grassroots activism is rarely the substance of evening news headlines, as is the formal political work of men, it is nonetheless significant in women’s contributions to political life. Feminists argue that the media have obscured much of women’s political activism, thereby lending the impression that women are not interested in politics or are ineffective in mobilizing on behalf of their interests. Furthermore, redefining the political to include the work that women do sheds more light on the political activism of working-class women and women of color—groups whose political contributions are largely ignored in the dominant culture, despite the fact that working-class women and women of color have a rich history of political organizing. Women work politically in the contexts in which they are found—local communities, workplaces, churches, and social service organizations, to name a few.

Because women's political action has been understudied and misunderstood, theories of political behavior typically fail to deal with gender as a central concept (Bookman and Morgen 1988); moreover, political theory has only in rare cases made women major subjects for analysis. As a consequence, much political analysis has made women invisible as political actors and made politics appear to be gender neutral. As two feminist scholars note, "Politics is conventionally understood as the activities of elected officials and the workings of government, both out of the reach of ordinary people" (Bookman and Morgen 1988:4). Such portrayals also create, among many women, a sense of disenfranchisement and alienation from mainstream politics, especially the working-class and poor women who are most disaffected by dominant institutions. This means that working-class and poor women have to make gains outside of traditional electoral politics—in factory organizing, in churches, on the streets, and through other grassroots activities—areas of political life that have been largely ignored by academic scholars.

Within grassroots politics, women are much more likely to contend with the intersecting politics of race, class, and gender. Through such political behavior, women challenge the dominant power relations of society and recognize the systematic forces that oppress women. Often through grassroots politics, women also change their ideas about the sources of their powerlessness and act to change conditions of their lives.

In sum, women are not as peripheral to politics as they might appear in an analysis of women and politics in the electoral world alone. Understanding the full range of women's political behavior means also seeing how working-class women and women of color have a long history of political activism, despite their invisibility in recorded history. These groups have also had a very feminist analysis, supporting women's independence and activism, even when this kind of feminism differs from—and is sometimes in conflict with—the feminism of White, middle-class women. For all women engaged in the feminist work, however, phrases such as *the personal is political* and *sexual politics* show how women have linked their everyday lives to their political action and beliefs.



THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Women's political activism can be found on any number of issues, particularly if you look beyond the formal political system. Women have been important in the work of many political groups that are organized on social and political issues, including environmental-action groups, groups uniting to fight racism, gay and lesbian movements, abortion rights groups, and many others too numerous to mention.

The women's movement, or the feminist movement, is one of the most significant and influential movements of our times. Imagine life where women cannot choose their career, no matter their interests or talent; where becoming pregnant means having to leave your job; where you have no access to birth control; where you cannot attend the best schools in the country; or when you could not wear pants to school or work! Not that long ago (as recently as the 1960s), this would have been the case for most women in the United States. You can thank the

women's movement for some of the very basic privileges and rights that you have today. There is probably no woman, or for that matter no man, in this country who has not been touched by some aspect of the women's movement, even though there is work still to be done, as the content of this book is showing you. Moreover, although many are reluctant to call themselves feminists, opinion polls show that the majority of people in the United States support the values and programs that the women's movement has encouraged and supported (Robison 2002; Saad 2003).

Social movements are groups that promote or resist changes in society. Movements often emerge because of a perceived sense of injustice and people's wishes to make change that will redress such injustices (Turner and Killian 1972). Social movements involve the sustained activity of organized groups, and they often include a network of organizations that, although they may have different goals and members, have a shared sense of belonging to the movement. Those who study social movements also try to identify the societal conditions that foster the development of the movements. To understand fully the contemporary women's movement, it is then necessary to look at the earlier development of feminism, thus we turn to the nineteenth century and the emergence of feminism therein.

American Feminism in the Nineteenth Century

In the United States, many of the early feminists were women who advocated the equal rights of women to acquire an education. You have seen this in some of the "History Speaks" features in this book. Women such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Anna Julia Cooper, and others were activists for women's education, understanding that this was essential for women to live freely in a democratic society.

Another early advocate of education for women was Emma Willard, who campaigned actively for the establishment of colleges for women in the 1920s. Frances Wright also was an active spokeswoman for the establishment of equal educational training for women. Education for women, these women argued, would extend the "rights of man" to all persons and therefore make for general and human improvement. As the result of their efforts, Oberlin College was the first college to admit women in 1833. Mount Holyoke College opened in 1837, Vassar in 1865, both Smith and Wellesley in 1875, Radcliffe in 1879, and Bryn Mawr in 1885 (Flexner 1975). Although extending education primarily to women of the upper class, these institutions nonetheless created an educated class of women, many of whom worked on behalf of women's rights.

Feminism did not, however, have its origins only in the activism of educated White women. Its political origins also lie in the abolitionist movement of the 1830s and the efforts of African American and White women and men to struggle for the abolition of slavery and women's rights. Charlotte Forten (1784–1884), an African American woman reformer and abolitionist, was a founder of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. She tutored her three daughters, Margaretta, Harriet, and Sarah Louise, each of whom was also active in the abolitionist and feminist movements. The Grimke sisters, Sarah (1792–1873) and Angelina (1805–1879), were daughters of a slaveholding family who traveled and spoke out vigorously against slavery in the 1830s. Both the Grimke sisters and Sarah Forten were delegates to the

first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women held in 1837. The correspondence between Sarah Forten and Angelina Grimke records their friendship and their strong sentiments about both **abolitionism** and feminism (Sterling 1984).

Frederick Douglass, a former slave and ardent abolitionist, supported women's rights for many years and was a strong supporter of women's suffrage. He and other male abolitionists believed that women's suffrage was necessary for the full enfranchisement of all citizens, although racism among White women and men in the women's rights movement forced Douglass and other abolitionists to subordinate the issue of women's suffrage to that of Black suffrage (DuBois 1978). The abolitionists saw clear links between freedom for slaves and freedom for women, although as the women's rights movement developed, White women discriminated against Black women in the movement and used racist appeals to argue for the extension of voting rights to White women.

From their work in the abolitionist movement, women learned how to organize a political movement. They challenged the assumption of the natural superiority of men and understood that suffrage was an important source for self-respect and social power. Historian Ellen Carol DuBois concluded that

abolitionism provided [American women] with a way to escape clerical authority, an egalitarian ideology, and a theory of social change, all of which permitted the leaders to transform the insights into the oppression of women which they shared with many of their contemporaries into the beginnings of the women's rights movement. (1978:32)

In 1840, a World Anti-Slavery Convention was held in London. The mere presence of women delegates at this convention generated excitement about the potential power of women, although women were relegated to the galleries and were prohibited from participating in the proceedings. But their exclusion ironically produced an increased awareness among women of the need for a women's movement. Upon returning to the United States, two of the women attending the convention, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, continued to meet and discussed strategies for establishing women's rights. On July 14, 1848, they called for a Woman's Rights Convention to be held in Seneca Falls, New York, five days later. Despite such short notice, 300 men and women came to Seneca Falls and there approved a Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Sentiments declared that "all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Hole and Levine 1971:6). Those attending the Seneca Falls Convention also passed 12 resolutions, one of which resolved to grant women the right to vote.

The Seneca Falls Convention has since been heralded as the official beginning of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. Other women's rights conventions were then held throughout the United States, including one in 1851 in Akron, Ohio, where Sojourner Truth, a former slave, challenged the popular doctrine of women's delicacy and physical inferiority. She exhorted:

Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over puddles, or gives me the best place—and ain't I a woman? . . . Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into

barns, and no man could head me—and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have born thirteen children, and seen most of 'em sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me—and ain't I a woman? (Hole and Levine 1971:191)

In the beginning, the women's movement was not just a single-issue movement. Feminists saw the issue of suffrage as one aspect of women's rights and advocated full equality for women. The momentum of the women's movement was stalled somewhat by the Civil War, but after the war, feminists worked hard to get the word *sex* added to the Fifteenth Amendment. The **Fifteenth Amendment** declares that the right to vote cannot be denied or abridged by race, color, or previous condition of servitude, but it did not extend to women—either White or African American. Although feminists' efforts to get the term *sex* added did not succeed, this setback furthered their resolve for suffrage; in 1869, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which embraced the broad cause of women's rights. A few months later, Lucy Stone and others organized the American Woman Suffrage Association. This organization restricted itself more narrowly to the suffrage issue, trying to avoid more controversial issues such as marriage and the church.

Suffrage, however, was not the only issue for which early feminists fought. The **temperance movement** in the late nineteenth century was organized by women with a strong feminist consciousness. The motto of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), under one of its early presidents, Frances Willard, was "Do everything!" Willard organized departments in the WCTU, each with its own programs of activity, including work in prisons, in kindergartens, and with the shut-in sick; other departments were concerned with physical culture and hygiene, prostitution, and motherhood. One department, the most effective, worked for suffrage. The temperance movement pressed for laws restricting the sale and consumption of alcohol; women were encouraged to join because their status as married women gave them no legal protection against abuse or abandonment by a drunken husband (Flexner 1975).

In 1890, the American and National Woman's Suffrage associations merged to become the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). By this time, the women's movement had become focused on the right to vote—a right they believed would open other opportunities and give women full rights as citizens. Shortly after the turn of the century, a second generation of U.S. feminists appeared, including women such as Carrie Chapman Catt, president of NAWSA. Also, Alice Paul, a young militant woman, became active in the suffrage movement. She formed a small radical group, the Congressional Union, to work on federal suffrage for women. The Congressional Union used tactics such as parades, mass demonstrations, and hunger strikes to further their cause. The combined efforts of the Congressional Union, NAWSA, and local suffrage groups and activists were eventually successful. On August 26, 1920, the **Nineteenth Amendment**, guaranteeing women the right to vote, was adopted.

With the success of the suffrage movement, the women's movement lost much of its public momentum and, many say, lay dormant for the years between passage

of the Nineteenth Amendment and the rebirth of feminism in the United States in the 1960s. Others have shown, though, that feminist activities through this period did not totally disappear. Many women continued to pursue feminist goals in a variety of organizations and contexts; their work provided continuity between the early women's movement and contemporary feminism. Although only a few organizations from the 1920s to the 1960s embraced explicitly feminist goals, the birth control and family planning movement, the settlement house movement, the establishment of organizations working to improve working conditions for employed women, and the founding of professional women's groups (including the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women) set the stage for feminist developments in later years (Ferree and Hess 1997).

Even in the post-World War II period, when cultural ideology strongly defended the idea that a woman's proper place was in the home, the National Women's Party, organized by Alice Paul, continued to fight for improving the status of women. The National Women's Party had one major plank in its platform—passage of the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)**. Since 1923, when the ERA was first introduced in Congress, Paul and other members of this organization worked to garner support from other women's organizations, lobbied Congress, and sought publicity for the amendment. Most other women's organizations opposed passage of the ERA, believing it would legitimate protective legislation for women. Despite their differing goals and philosophies, all of these organizations provided strong support networks for women in the particularly hostile environment of post-World War II sexist ideology (Rupp and Taylor 1987). And, although parts of the women's movement were less active, Black women in the United States during this period, were laying some of the groundwork for what became perhaps the most significant movement of the twentieth century—the civil rights movement, itself a huge influence on the emergence of the second wave of feminism.

The Emergence of the Contemporary Women's Movement

Several transformations in women's roles occurred during the 1950s and 1960s that influenced the development of contemporary feminism, including changes in women's labor force participation, a change in women's fertility patterns, increases in women's educational levels, and ideological patterns that glamorized women's domestic life. In the 1950s, White women were idealized as happy housewives whose primary purpose was to care for their husbands and children. In that decade, women were marrying younger, but they were also having fewer children because widespread use of contraception gave women control over their fertility. At the same time, White, middle-class women were better educated. Although their education was intended to make them better wives and mothers, they were acquiring many of the same skills as men. For women in the home, technological changes in housework simplified physical tasks, but the increased consumption and new patterns of family life in automobile-based suburbs complicated the role of housewives. Although there was less physical labor associated with housework, housewives were supposed to be constantly available to their children. Whatever



HISTORY SPEAKS: YESTERDAY'S FEMINISTS TALK ABOUT TODAY

Alice Paul and the Equal Rights Amendment



"I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality."

—Alice Paul (interview, 1972; www.alicepaul.org)

Born in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, Alice Paul (1885–1977) was the daughter of Quaker parents who firmly believed in gender equality. Some have said that Alice Paul was one of the most influential women in America, although she is now often forgotten and rarely taught as one of the nation's pioneering feminists.

Alice Paul was educated at Swarthmore College, where she received a B.A. in Biology (1905), followed by an M.A. in Sociology (1907) and a Ph.D. in Economics (1912) from the University of Pennsylvania. Highly educated, she also received three law degrees (an LL.B. from Washington University and an LL.M. and D.C.L. from American University). Paul worked tirelessly to bring equal rights to women, beginning her political activism while a student at Swarthmore. She became a militant suffragist while studying in England after her college graduation, returning home and committing herself to the struggle for women's suffrage in the United States.

Paul joined the National American Women's Suffrage Association and planned dramatic actions to capture the public's attention and garner support for women's suffrage. This included organizing a massive parade in Washington, DC, on the day of President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. The march down Pennsylvania Avenue became a violent confrontation when male onlookers shouted obscenities and

then physically attacked the suffragists. This event and other militant actions brought the topic of suffrage to public awareness.

But, even once women earned the right to vote, Alice Paul was convinced that this was not enough. She believed that women still needed full and equal rights before the law. In 1923, she announced that she would be working for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would guarantee equal rights for women.

"Equality of rights shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Simple words, complex politics. These are the words of the Equal Rights Amendment that Alice Paul advocated. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was first introduced to the U.S. Congress in 1923, but never passed until 1972. Even then, it failed because an insufficient number of states ratified it. To this day, the ERA has not been adopted as a constitutional guarantee of women's rights.

Thinking Further: If Alice Paul were alive today, she would likely still be advocating for constitutional protections for women. Why do you think the amendment has not passed? What would it take to get it passed?

Source: Based on information provided by the Alice Paul Institute. 2010. www.alicepaul.org.

time was saved by labor-saving appliances was more than replaced by increased shopping, transporting of children, and nurturing of family members. The dominant ideology of housework and motherhood told middle-class women that their work in the home would bring them fulfillment and gratification, but, in fact, many found the experience to be depressing, isolating, and boring.

This situation created a crisis for White, middle-class White women that was brought to the attention of the public by the appearance of Betty Friedan's best-seller, *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan's book, published in 1963, identified what she called "the problem that has no name"—in other words, the isolation of women in the family was a source for women's discontent. In her book, Friedan critically assailed the establishment (including mass advertising, women's magazines, and Freudian psychology) as contributing to women's problems. The chord she struck was soon repeated by a number of critical assessments of women's roles that appeared in academic and popular literature (Evans 1979).

In addition to experiencing a crisis in domestic life, women were, at the same time, appearing in the labor force in greater numbers. Throughout the 1950s, women from White, middle-class families entered the labor force at a faster rate than any other group. They were working not just in the years before marriage but later, in addition to their marriage and family roles. Although married women's work experience was defined in terms of helping their families, it broadened their horizons at the same time that it made them conscious of discrimination in the workplace. The decade of the 1950s and the early 1960s created a self-conscious cohort of women who lived in the contradictions of a society that idealized their role and promised them opportunity and gratification while it devalued their labor and denied them self-expression.

Professional women working within established institutions began pressuring politicians to recognize the problems facing women in the United States. In 1961, although it was likely done for political reasons, President John F. Kennedy appointed a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. The Commission was charged with documenting "prejudices and out-moded customs that act as barriers to the full realization of women's basic rights" (Hole and Levine 1971:18) and with making recommendations designed to alleviate the problem. The Commission report, *American Women*, was released in 1963, the same year that Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* appeared.

The Commission's report made a number of recommendations involving employment and labor discrimination. It was the basis for the Equal Pay Act of 1963, requiring that men and women receive equal pay for equal work performed under equal conditions (Hole and Levine 1971:28ff). Problems in enforcing this law and exemptions that were later attached to it prohibited the act from making the radical changes it implied; thus, the commission's work had only a moderate effect. The commission also held steadfastly to the idea that the nuclear family was the foundation of U.S. history and that women's role in the family was an invaluable and necessary resource. Although recognizing the contribution that women made to the home, the commission ignored the effects of home life on women that Friedan's book so strikingly portrayed.

These developments within both the government and the society provided the context for women to begin to question their traditional roles, but it remained for major social movements of the period to crystallize the vague discontent that women felt. The birth of contemporary feminism must be seen as also stemming from the civil rights movement and, later, the anti-Vietnam War and student movements.

Feminism and Civil Rights

The civil rights movement was initiated within African American communities of the South during the 1950s as a challenge to public racial segregation and White racial prejudice. Although there had been a longer history within Black communities of organizing for civil rights, the 1950s provided the spark that mobilized this mass social movement. Like the nineteenth-century U.S. feminists who had developed their feminist politics through participation in the abolitionist movement, women working in the civil rights movement soon saw their own oppression as similar to the racial injustices against which they were organizing. Women worked in the civil rights movement out of their felt need to remedy the inequities of racial injustice, which they saw as a moral issue calling for their humanitarian participation. For White women and men, joining the civil rights movement required a radical departure from the dominant beliefs and practices of White society. Their challenge to the status quo on racial issues was soon to influence the way they also interpreted other social issues (Evans 1979).

Between 1963 and 1965, White liberals from the North (especially male and female college students) went to the South in great numbers to assist in the civil rights struggle. The nonviolent direct-action projects in which they engaged (voter registration drives, protest marches, and sit-ins) forced them to encounter institutional racism and generated a new consciousness not only of racial issues but of the institutional structure of society in the United States (Rothschild 1979). Most important, the civil rights movement's emphasis on examining the roots of oppression caused many White people to look into their own experience so as to comprehend their relationship to dominant institutions. In so doing, White women in the movement began to see the origins of their own oppression—both as they had learned sexism in their own lives and as it was reflected in the public institutions of society.

Both White and Black women believed that the movement had failed to address the issue of sexual inequality. Black women in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) wrote position papers protesting the fact that women in the movement were relegated to clerical work, were not given leadership and decision-making positions, and were belittlingly referred to as "girls." White women, supporting the idea that the movement should be led by Black activists, were reluctant to present their own analysis of sexism. At the same time, distrust between Black and White women made the alliance between Black and White women uneasy (Breines 2006; Evans 1979). Yet, the consciousness of both Black and White women around gender inequality was strongly influenced by their activism within the Black protest movement.

For African American women, however, the concept of sisterhood was developed in a different context than is the case for White women. African American women's political identity has more likely been formed around racial consciousness,

and as a result, Black women tend to see feminist issues in a different context than do White women (Dill 1983). Especially in the early days of second wave feminism, White women tended to see themselves oppressed as a sexual group. It has been the awareness of African American women that has generated an understanding within feminism that gender inequality is intricately linked to race and class inequality (Collins 1990).

The Second Wave of Feminism

By the late 1960s, feminism had developed as a full-fledged movement, with a variety of organizations, local consciousness-raising groups, and political strategies intended to advocate transformations in women's status in society. Referred to as "the second wave of feminism" (in contrast to the nineteenth-century "first wave"), the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s had diverse origins, philosophies, and strategies for change.

Two major branches of the feminist movement evolved: the *women's rights* branch and the *women's liberation* branch. The women's rights branch took an "equal rights" strategy—working to extend equal rights to women, particularly through legal reform and antidiscrimination policies. Important in this part of the feminist movement was the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)**, the proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that states: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on the basis of sex." Advocates of the ERA saw it as essential for providing a constitutional foundation to protect women from gender inequality; opponents feared it would force women into military combat. Trivial as it seems, much of the opposition voiced their opposition by worrying about it eliminating separate public bathrooms for men and women! To date, the Equal Rights Amendment—a simple statement of gender equality—has not been approved, although there is a persistent effort to make this historic amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The women's rights branch of the women's movement was centered in a philosophy of antidiscrimination; thus, the best remedies would be the creation of gender-blind policies and institutions in which all persons, regardless of sex (or race, religious preference, sexual preference, or physical disability), have equal rights. The women's liberation branch of the feminist movement, on the other hand, took a more far-reaching analysis, seeing that transformation in women's status requires not just legal and political reform but radical transformation of basic social institutions, including, to name a few, the family, sexuality, religion, and education. Women's rights and women's liberation are not separate movements, but the analytical distinction between the two shows the different political and social theories on which feminism is built. As you will see, the women's rights approach is more centered in the context of liberal political theory, while women's liberation has its roots in more radical political theory.

Each wing of the feminist movement developed different strategies for change. The women's rights wing mobilized for equal rights and tends to work within existing political institutions. The organizations that have evolved from this branch of feminism are typically more formal, with hierarchical leadership and authority structures, and with more formal procedures and rules for membership (Freeman 1973).

The style and organization of women's liberation groups, on the other hand, reflected their more radical and grassroots base. The organization of feminist groups within this branch of the women's movement was deliberately nonhierarchical and with informal procedures and networks (Freeman 1973). This encouraged analyses that were more critical of established institutions, but it also engaged individual women in examining their own experience and its relationship to institutionalized inequality and sexism. This branch of feminism also recognized that personal life was tied to the structure of public institutions and would be altered only as these institutions changed.

The more radical feminist groups often emerged from the New Left and drew their participants from women who were critical of the often sexist and patronizing behavior of radical men (Evans 1979). Their early political analysis was forged from the appeals to justice that the civil rights and leftist movements had articulated and that women felt were being denied to them. Women in the antiwar and student movements of the 1960s were radicalized not only by the philosophies of these movements but also by the sexist behavior of men within the movements. African American women whose leadership had been central in the civil rights movement were often relegated to secondary status in the Black power movement, as the movement became more influenced by advocates of Black nationalism. Women's participation in all of these movements had the effect of further radicalizing White and African American women's feminist perspectives.

Feminism for the Twenty-First Century: A Third Wave?

With the evolution of the feminist movement over time, early distinctions between the equal rights and women's liberation branches of feminism have blurred, although diverse political beliefs and strategies among feminists remain. Some of those who were radical feminists in the 1960s and 1970s—then younger women, students, and movement activists—now work in positions of some power and influence. At the same time, liberal feminist organizations, although they work within the existing political system, are also influenced by more radical feminist thought. Race, class, and gender have also become more central to feminist politics and feminist analyses. Although tensions continue to exist between White women and women of color, the feminism of women of color has become more elaborated, and more White women have worked to challenge their own racism and to build analyses that are inclusive of race, class, and gender.

Starting in the 1990s, feminists faced two new challenges: the identification of a so-called postfeminist generation and a backlash against feminism, both from the mainstream media and from the rise of the new religious and political right. The dominant media generated a strong image of feminism as no longer necessary and a thing of the past (Faludi 1991). In addition, the media created a stereotype of feminism that stigmatized it in the eyes of many, especially younger women. This image of feminists as anti-male, lesbian, humorless, and politically correct ideologues made feminism seem unapproachable to many, including those who otherwise supported its values and goals (Whittier 1995).

The rise of the religious right has also promoted values specifically opposed to the feminist agenda. The right's advocacy of "traditional family values" endorses



FOCUS ON RESEARCH

I'm Not a Feminist, But . . .

What does it mean to call oneself a feminist? Not surprisingly, many women and men support feminist policies, but do not call themselves "feminists." Perhaps this is not surprising because of the derogatory terms often used to describe feminists ("man-haters," "feminazis," "politically correct"). The rise of conservatism and a backlash against the feminist movement all contribute to a reluctance on the part of many to call themselves feminists.

Curious about this phenomena, especially given the widespread support for feminist goals (such as equal employment, family leave policies, anti-rape action, and so forth), Janice McCabe studied the relationship between feminist identity and support for other social and political issues. In her study, and drawing from others, she notes that women with feminist identities generally are better educated, urban, and with smaller families. She also notes the studies that show more support for feminist policies than for actually calling oneself a feminist. But in her research, she extends these results to examine more fully the relationships between feminist identity and support for gender-related attitudes.

Using data from the National Opinion Research Center, a nationally based survey based on a random sample of respondents, McCabe finds that

29 percent of women and 12 percent of men identify as feminists. Consistent with earlier research, she also finds that education is related to feminist identity. But race, family status, and work status is not. She finds that rural residents are less likely than others to identify as feminists, but residence in the South is not related to whether one identifies as feminist or not. In other words, feminists are not just White, middle-class, northern women.

The most detailed parts of McCabe's work examine the relationship between feminist self-identity and support for other issues. She finds that feminist identity among women is not related to attitudes about ideal gender arrangements. And she finds that those with feminist identities are more likely to explain women's status as the result of broad societal arrangements, even when, among feminists, the particulars of this explanation vary.

McCabe's work shows that feminism is a more complex identity and set of beliefs than is commonly assumed in public stereotypes about feminism. Her work cautions us against assuming a simplistic understanding of the label *feminist*.

Source: Based on McCabe, Janice. 2005. "The Relationship between Feminist Self-Identification and 'Feminist' Attitudes among U.S. Women and Men." *Gender & Society* 19 (August): 480-505.

an antifeminist stance, one promoting a strong connection of women to the home, little tolerance of diverse family forms, and many extremely homophobic platforms directed against gays and lesbians, such as some of the ballot initiatives in different states to deny same-sex marriage. The influence of the conservative right wing in politics has meant lost ground on important issues such as abortion rights, gay and lesbian rights, and state or federal support for any number of social programs that support women and their children. And, the right-wing attack on being "politically correct" has thus also generated a climate that is less tolerant of—indeed, hostile to—feminist perspectives.

In this context, there is little wonder that younger women in the new century may find themselves confused by feminism. Although the media has portrayed this generation as a "postfeminist" one, a more careful look finds that young women and men are those most likely to support feminist values, even though

they may be reluctant to call themselves feminists. When asked if they support the specific goals of feminism, the majority of young people say yes, with widespread support for such feminist issues as equal employment opportunities for women, more equality in family roles, support of reproductive freedom, agreement with affirmative action, and support for more women in public office (Schnittker et al. 2003; Hall and Rodriguez 2003). The most likely age groups to support feminism are younger women and women who are now middle-aged who became adults during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s (Peltola et al. 2004; Aronson 2003).

Ironically, the image of young women and men as uninterested in feminism has been most prevalent at the same time that enrollments in women's studies courses have soared on most college campuses. It is probably more accurate to say that young women are not so much antifeminist as they are cautious about being identified with a movement so reviled in the media and that they see as stemming from the concerns of a different generation.

Young women growing up today have had very different experiences from those of their mothers' generation, many of whom were part of the second wave of feminism. Younger women have grown up in a period dominated by conservative, not progressive, values. They have also benefited from the gains made by the second wave of feminism, so they do not have to worry so much about access to birth control, rights to education and employment, or exclusion from formerly men-only occupations and organizations—some of the issues that activated the second wave of feminism.

Still, issues about women's safety from violence, men's and women's sexual identities, work and family roles, and other opportunities are by no means resolved. Young people have also grown up in a context where the politics of personal identity—gender identity, racial-ethnic identity, and sexual identity—have been a vocal topic in the political world. The generational differences between young women and their feminist foremothers thus shape the reactions of many young women to feminist politics (Whittier 1995). At the same time, however, the shape of the third wave of feminism will be determined by the political action taken by younger women and men who define feminism in the context of their own life experiences and needs (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Moraga et al. 2002; Labaton and Martin 2004; Walker 1995; Hernández and Rehman 2002).

In sum, there has been no demise of the women's movement. Quite the contrary, the women's movement remains one of the most influential sources of social change, even though there is not a single national organization that is identified as representing feminism. Some of the most radical feminist activities occur at the grassroots level, where women struggle against poverty, violence, harassment, and exploitation. At the same time, more mainstream feminist organizations continue to work on behalf of women's health and welfare, safety and security, and educational and employment rights. Just as the feminist movement has ebbed and flowed with different emphases and different agendas over the past 100 years or more, so will its future be influenced by the needs of diverse women in their own times.

Chapter Summary and Themes

Power is the ability to influence others; as an organized system of power, the state has operated as a gendered institution, excluding women from positions of leadership and operating within a masculinist framework.

One of the ironies of considering the state from a feminist perspective is that it has operated as a patriarchal institution—against women’s interests—at the same time that the state has been an avenue by which feminists have sought to eliminate formal discrimination and others forms of gender inequity.

As women have moved into more professional roles within the legal system, many have wondered whether women will administer justice differently from men, based on presumed gender differences in women’s values.

Evidence of gender differences in the administration of justice is mixed. Some studies show that women use a unique standpoint in judgments about sentencing and in their perspective on issues before the law, but one must be careful not to overstate such differences, given the empirical evidence.

Women continue to be underrepresented in all aspects of formal political institutions, even though their numbers are increasing in this arena.

Explanations of the underrepresentation of women as elected officials include such factors as gender socialization, persistent gender bias in attitudes about political skills, exclusion from political networks, women’s lesser resources for financing campaigns, and the dual roles that women have in the family and at work.

A gender gap in men’s and women’s attitudes about political and social issues persists, with women generally being more liberal than men.

Although women are generally more likely to support values such as peace, government support for social services, feminist issues, and so forth, one has to be careful not to attribute this to *essential* differences between women and men. People’s opinions vary by other factors, such as generational differences, race, social class, and other social factors. Also, changes in the society at large can result in changed public attitudes.

Although still a minority of those serving in active military duty, women have increased their representation within the military, even though the military is still well-described as a gendered institution.

Women’s historic exclusion from the military was justified based on their need for men’s protection. As that attitude has eroded, women have moved into diverse military roles, although they are still underrepresented as officers. Public support for women serving in combat has grown. The extent of sexual harassment in the military and the suspicion directed against gays and lesbians shows how the military is structured around a culture of masculinity.

Although women have historically been excluded from many roles in the major political institutions, they have nonetheless been politically active, often in grassroots movements organized to meet community needs.

Although women have not always been visible in public political roles, when you think about political behavior more broadly, you see that women have a long history of political activism—activism that shows women to be strong, independently minded, and attentive to the needs of diverse groups, including their own communities.

The feminist movement, which dates to the nineteenth century, appeared in a “second wave” beginning in the late 1960s. It has been one of the most influential social movements of recent history.

Studies find that a substantial majority of the U.S. public supports feminist issues, although many are reluctant to call themselves feminist because of how the dominant culture stigmatizes that label. Still, younger generations, now constituting a third wave of feminism, support feminist issues and have actively engaged in actions intended to reduce violence against women, protect women’s rights in education and employment, and to promote women’s health and security.

Key Terms

abolitionism	Fifteenth Amendment	power
authority	gender gap	power elite
Civil Rights Bill of 1964	Nineteenth Amendment	social movement
Equal Pay Act of 1963	patriarchy	state
Equal Rights Amendment	pluralism	temperance movement
essentialism		

Discussion Questions/Projects for Thought

1. Watch the national evening news for one week, keeping notes on which stories are reported and when women are mentioned. How frequently do women appear in the news? When they do, what is being reported? Are women depicted as active political news makers or are they “on the sidelines” of the news? What does this tell you about gender and politics?
2. Contact the military base nearest to you and inquire about services for military wives. What services are provided? What does this teach you about the experiences of women associated with the military? In what ways is the military a gendered institution?
3. Take a current piece of legislation being debated by your state legislature or the federal government, and ask yourself: What are the implications of this law for women? Are the implications being considered as part of this political debate? If so, in what terms? If not, why not?