

Term Paper Article: Read the article and be prepared to answer questions that will follow.

news is that women's relative gains came largely because men are earning less (Boushey, 2001; Nussbaum, 2002; UAW, 2002). While we cannot say that gender is *the* cause of income differences between Americans, we can safely conclude that it is *a* cause—and a significant one. The data are certainly clear. But the reason for scientific research is to explain data. Why do men earn more money than women? As discussed further in Chapter 13, different theoretical perspectives provide different answers. Functionalists suggest that women act as a reserve labor force to be called on when needed by their families or by society. Conflict theorists suggest that men make the rules that will maintain their economic advantage over women; hence, gender discrimination in the workplace remains a reality. Symbolic interactionists suggest that since the workplace is largely gender segre-

gated, powerful social definitions assign a lesser value to the work women do compared with the work men do. Each of the three perspectives explains the same data on gender and the wage gap differently. The best explanations account for most of the data and for changes in the data over time.

SOCIETY CONNECTIONS

The Ethics of Research

Like all scientists, sociologists routinely confront ethical issues in conducting their research. These ethical issues are more apparent in some studies than in others. As demonstrated by the infamous Tuskegee study

THEN AND NOW



The Tuskegee Experiment

At the beginning of the 20th century syphilis was a ravaging and incurable disease. Little was known about its progression in the human body. To learn more about the disease, in 1932 the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) worked with prestigious Tuskegee University to recruit as research subjects 399 African American men from Macon County, Alabama, one of the state's poorest rural areas. All of the men had syphilis, but were told they were being treated for "bad blood." On clinic days they ate, had a place to stay, and received free medical care—luxuries for poor people during the Depression. What they were told was a sham. What they were not told was the true research question: "What are the long-term effects of untreated syphilis on Negro males?" The study continued for the next three decades, even after penicillin became the standard remedy for syphilis. During World War II the subjects were screened out of the armed forces for fear they would leave the study because their disease would be discovered. But the dis-

ease was left untreated. Some men became incapacitated, blind, and impotent. Others died. In 1972, when the study became public, the American Medical Association charged the USPHS with conducting genocide against the poor. The race factor in the experiment could not be denied. In 1997 President Bill Clinton apologized to those who survived the Tuskegee Experiment. Attitudes about research experiments were examined in a focus group bringing together 60 African Americans who watched a television movie about the Tuskegee experiment. Although participants believed that research was important, they readily distinguished between the type of research they would be willing to participate in and why they would do so. As dramatized in the movie, the Tuskegee study clearly aroused suspicion about research that has not been erased among African Americans.

Today many legal, institutional, and professional pressures ensure that scientific investigations are carried out ethically. Ethical guidelines require an answer to the question, How has respect for the

rights and welfare of the participants been demonstrated? Informed consent (see page 57) is one way to demonstrate this respect. Because there will always be research that cannot provide complete information to subjects and accomplish its purpose, the strategy of "reasonably informed consent" has been accepted as a model. If people are told what they can "reasonably" expect in terms of risk or discomfort, as well as potential benefits, and are given answers to their questions, then they should be able to make an informed decision about whether to participate as research subjects.

1. How could the Tuskegee experiment be redesigned so that it could be carried out ethically yet still provide important answers to the question of the impact of syphilis? What changes in the study question would have to be made?

2. Can the Tuskegee study legitimately be described as an experiment? Why or why not?

3. Identify 10 ethical guidelines required of researchers to follow.

Sources: Reynolds, 1982:4; Jones, 1993; Harter et al., 2000; Reverby, 2000; Freimuth et al., 2001; Van Den Hoonaard, 2001.