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YESTERDAY AND TODAY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 2.1 Understand the impact of the advent of a market economy and the Industrial Revolution prior to the 20th century on the household distribution of economic roles.
- 2.2 Describe the impact of World Wars I and II in the first half of the 20th century on the sex distribution of economic roles.
- 2.3 Discuss the impact of women's increased educational attainment and the women's liberation movement in the second half of the 20th century on the sex distribution of economic roles.
- 2.4 Recognize the influence of social developments in the 21st century on workplace dynamics.
- 2.5 Discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender roles in the workplace.
- 2.6 Describe current trends in labor force participation and educational attainment.
- 2.7 Define the sex segregation of occupations and describe its current status.
- 2.8 Identify factors that influence the sex gap in pay.

Young people are entering a very different work world from past decades, with new expectations of what they will encounter as well as new expectations of others that they will have to meet. How different are the current roles that women and men play in the workplace compared with those of the past? Gender roles have traditionally suggested that men's proper place is at work and women's proper place is at home. These norms for behavior have had a profound impact on relations between women and men in all spheres of society—the family, the educational system, the legal system, and the workplace. However, they have been increasingly flouted over time. If traditional gender roles have been tossed aside, what has replaced them (if anything)?

In this chapter, we first provide a historical perspective by considering the evolution of the economic roles of women and men in American society since the nation

was founded. We trace the impact of diverse historical events, such as the advent of industrialization, two world wars, the women's liberation movement, the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, we look at current roles played in the workforce, considering sex differences as well as differences among racial and ethnic groups. Finally, we consider the impact of the changes in workplace roles over time on current economic realities and their implications for work relationships among different-sex individuals today.

SOCIETY PRIOR TO THE 20TH CENTURY

Throughout the recorded history of Western civilizations, a **patriarchal social system** in which the male has authority over the female has almost always prevailed or at least has been the public norm. Early American society was no exception. Puritan New Englanders, who were prominent in the founding of the American colonies, believed in a hierarchy within the family, with the man as head and the women and children as subordinates. Man's role in the home was seen as similar to God's role in the universe—that is, in charge. However, Puritans weren't the only group to endorse the concept of patriarchy. Members of other religious groups who were early American settlers shared the same attitudes regarding male supremacy. These attitudes were in force as the colonists wrested control over their affairs from Great Britain in the Revolutionary War and formed their own government.

The decision to rebel against Great Britain was made by men. The Preamble of the U.S. Constitution referred only to men. In the conferences that led to the formation of the new nation, it was never considered that anyone other than men should have the same rights and privileges that men had bestowed upon themselves. The right to vote was not granted to women until 1920, long after it was theoretically granted to men who were former slaves and only then after a half-century of resistance. As far as the conduct of public affairs was concerned, women played little direct role in the early shaping of the American republic.¹

Although disenfranchised, women played a considerable role in the economic system of early American society. Prior to the 1800s, society was predominantly agrarian, with most work taking place in or around the home. Women and men were engaged in different activities. For example, men were responsible for tasks that called for lifting heavy burdens and women were responsible for matters related to clothing and food preparation. However, the activities of all household members, children included, were essential to the family economy, as all who were able to do so worked at productive tasks.

Women became managers of shops, businesses, plantations, or farms only through the early deaths of their husbands. According to English Common Law, which governed the colonies until the Revolutionary War, a woman could not appear in court, enter into a contract, or inherit from heirs without the approval of a male relative or

guardian. Nonetheless, economic needs took precedence over legalities. Women were too skilled a resource to not be fully utilized in preindustrial America.²

The slow rise of a **market economy** altered the relationships between married women and men markedly. Better production and distribution methods began to allow the sale in the marketplace of farm produce and crafted goods that were not needed by the family. Because of the types of activities that men and women had performed, the products that men made were more likely to enter the marketplace than those produced by women. For example, milk, wheat, and wool, produced by men or both women and men, could be sold to townspeople. Butter, bread, and cloth, produced by women, could then be readily manufactured within most of those families. As a result, men, more often than women, received and thereby controlled the money coming into the family. Their control was legitimized by the religious and social doctrines that had been paid lip service but had been effectively dormant for some time.

During the same period, the American legal system was refined and tightened, and previously unwritten laws were codified. The cultural doctrines supporting male supremacy that had been unofficial since English Common Law had become no longer applicable. They were now formalized in a manner compatible with the new market economy in which men dominated economic life. Wives became legally obligated to serve the wishes of their husbands, and husbands were legally elevated to the position of almost total dominance and responsibility.

The labor of wives was still valuable after the advent of the market economy, but it could not be sold as easily. Its value depended on the use the family could make of it. When piecework manufacturing methods were later developed, women who worked in their homes could also earn wages outside the home. However, by this time, the laws formalizing women's subordinate position to men were already in place. Had the laws been codified earlier, the de facto equality between the sexes then in existence might have been recognized. Had they been codified later, men and women might have been accorded equal status.

Despite its apparent rigidity after the advent of the market economy, the economic system in America ordinarily would have been expected to continue changing to allow for the most efficient division of labor. However, the **Industrial Revolution** temporarily suspended the need for further changes by allowing economic superiority to be achieved through the superior organization of production. With surplus production, it became possible for more affluent husbands to keep their wives at home rather than allow them outside work. Thus, the stay-at-home wife became a status symbol for men in American society. This division of labor outwardly copied the earlier fashion of life among European nobility, allowed the conspicuous demonstration of affluence, and reaffirmed the legally defined superior/subordinate relationship between the husband and the wife. Growing general affluence allowed the practice to spread gradually until it became institutionalized as an ideal, the standard against which other allocations of roles between the sexes were judged. However, this ideal was largely based on the

experiences of White middle-class families, which differed greatly from the experiences of other families. Men of color tended to hold agricultural, mining, or service jobs that were considered too low-paying, insecure, dangerous, or degrading by most White men. The impact of historical forces was similar in other Western cultures.³

Unmarried women, who were relied upon as workers in the early days of the Industrial Revolution, were subject to a different set of economic forces but the same social norms. To avoid the miserable working conditions and abuse of female and child labor that had taken place in British factories, Francis Cabot Lowell introduced the **Waltham system** of large-scale manufacturing to the New England textile industry in the 1810s. Factory communities built by Lowell and his associates in mill towns throughout New England were designed with adult females in mind as the workers. Primarily single and from farming families, these women were required to reside in boardinghouses under the direction of a matron employed by the company. The matron enforced regulations regarding proper behavior, including a 10 o'clock curfew and mandatory church attendance. These arrangements were intended to assure Yankee farmers that their daughters would not be working in places of sin and corruption and the community that the invasion of a large number of young women would not drastically alter its social fabric.

The women mainly tended the roving and spinning frames and minded the looms in the mills. Men were employed primarily as overseers, as machinists, and in other heavy occupations or in those requiring a definite skill, such as printing. Men's wages were typically set at the prevailing wage rate for the appropriate skill or trade. Women's wages were set at a level high enough to induce them to leave the farms and stay away from other forms of employment, such as domestic service, but low enough to offer an advantage for employing females rather than males and to compete with the wages of unskilled workers in British textile factories.

Female factory workers, whose ranks gradually came to include widows and wives from poorer families as well as single women, did not conform to the female gender role that was being developed in White middle-class families. They had no choice about whether to work. Instead, their wages often made them the primary wage earners in their families, which became all the more important when New England's farming economy began a long period of decline in the 1830s. As a lifestyle of genteel leisure became the ideal for all women, those in the growing female workforce were looked down upon for having to work. A "cult of true womanhood," led by middle-class reformers such as Catherine Beecher, encouraged women to guard their natural place—the home—with their virtues of "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity." Thus, the spread of industrialization was affecting women throughout society. For some, it meant long hours in the factory. For others, it meant isolation in the home.⁴

The Industrial Revolution also greatly affected the lives of men. Toward the end of the 19th century, men were required to work in factories in increasing numbers due

to the rise of heavy industry, for which women were regarded as too frail. The shift from an agricultural to an industrial society changed the ways in which men made use of their abilities and assessed their self-worth. In much earlier days, men proved their worth by demonstrating their physical prowess at killing animals for food. More recently, men had been admired as craftsmen for their skills at making things. Now, the role of strong provider and skilled artisan was being replaced by the role of keeper of the machines. Even though the Industrial Revolution provided mass-produced goods and a less strenuous way of life for most, it also robbed many men of their opportunity for creativity and accomplishment and of their sense of purpose.⁵

With the rise of the market economy and then the Industrial Revolution, both husbands and wives realized that the husband was providing the major economic support for the family. Attitudes changed to conform to this new economic relationship. Wives changed their attitudes to make themselves more subordinate to their husbands' desires. Husbands' attitudes changed in the direction of feeling more superior to their wives than they did before, even though they weren't as fulfilled by their factory work. Whereas social doctrine had been declaring for some time that men were already superior to women, it had been expressing the official and unofficial norms of American society rather than the economic reality. Now, at least for the more affluent, reality had caught up with the norms.

Thus, we have identified the source of what have come to be known as traditional gender roles in American society. These roles, developed within White middle-class families that could afford to have the woman not earn wages outside the home, provided an ideal that was supposed to apply to all families. However, the label of "traditional" is misleading. It implies a constancy in the actual economic roles of women and men that simply has not been present, although public norms about economic roles have varied less. Why did these particular traditions become cast as ideal rather than traditions based on the greater equality in women's and men's economic roles that had prevailed before? It's probably because they most agreed with the doctrine of a patriarchal social system, which had been brought to America by its original settlers. It's certainly not because they were adhered to by all social classes and not because they reflected the economic roles that were to emerge in the years to come.

FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

As the 20th century began, the United States (U.S.) labor force was clearly differentiated by sex. Census statistics regarding **labor force participation rates** showed that 19% of women and 80% of men were in the labor force (see Table 2.1). In other words, four of every five women *were not* engaged in paid employment, whereas four out of every five men *were*.

In the decades between 1900 and 1940, labor force participation rates for men and women remained essentially unchanged, despite the occurrence of several major

TABLE 2.1 ■ Labor Force Participation Rates

Year	Percentage in the U.S. Labor Force	
	Women	Men
1900	19	80
1910	23	81
1920	21	78
1930	22	76
1940	25	79
1950	31	80
1960	35	79
1970	42	78
1980	51	77
1990	58	76
2000	60	75
2010	59	71
2020	56	68
2023	57	68

Sources: **1900–1970:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. (1975). *Historical statistics of the United States: Colonial times to 1970* (pp. 127–128, Series D11–25). Government Printing Office; **1980–2020:** U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey*, Table 2. Retrieved October 19, 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps>; **2023:** U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey*, Table A-3. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps>.

Note: **1900–1930:** data for persons 10 years old and over; **1940–1960:** data for persons 14 years old and over; **1970–2023:** data for persons 16 years old and over.

wages than previous levels as large numbers of men went off to war. However, no sustained change in the employment of women resulted. In fact, the labor force participation rate of women in 1920 (21%) was slightly lower than it had been in 1910 (23%). Labor unions, government, and society in general were not ready for more than a

events. A garment workers' strike at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York from 1909 to 1910, led and carried out by women, became the largest women's strike in American history. It contributed to support for the unionization of the garment industry, which was the largest employer of women at the time. However, the strike yielded mixed results for the predominantly immigrant women who carried it out, and women's subsequent acceptance as members of male-dominated labor unions was begrudgingly slow.⁶

During the same time, women as well as men were immigrating to the U.S. in large numbers. Women's immigration tended to be highest from nations in which they had high autonomy and relatively low prospects for both marriage and employment. Immigration was largely unrestricted and unregulated until the passage of the National Origins Act in 1924, which instituted nationality-based quotas. After then through 1965 (when nationality-based quotas were repealed), female immigrants were more likely to be married to men who had immigrated earlier on their own and become American citizens before calling for their wives to join them.⁷

World War I (1914 to 1918) created new jobs for women at higher

temporary change in the economic role of women. Men received first priority in hiring when they returned from the war, and many women were driven from the labor force.

The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote, was passed in 1920 after a seven-decade-long women's suffrage movement that had begun with the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the first women's rights convention. Its backers hoped that ending sex discrimination in the right to vote would lead to the dismantling of sex discrimination in other areas and usher in a new era of gender equality. However, women's suffrage brought about little change in women's economic status and roles.⁸

The Great Depression, extending from the U.S. stock market crash in 1929 to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, threw millions of Americans out of work. The unemployment rate rose considerably, peaking at 25% during 1933. These conditions contributed to an identity crisis for unemployed men of all races. In the book *Puzzled America*, published in 1935, Sherwood Anderson concluded,

The breaking down of the moral fiber of the American man through being out of a job, losing that sense of being some part of the moving world of activity, so essential to an American man's sense of his manhood . . . can never be measured in dollars.⁹

The Great Depression caused great strains in family relations as unemployed men suffered a loss of status in their families. Those who relied upon holding an authoritative role in the family and society felt humbled and disgraced. In addition, it triggered resentment toward working women, especially working wives. The attention being expended on the problems of men intensified the attitude that working women were depriving male breadwinners of employment. However, these dynamics were not reflected in the labor force participation rates of women and men shown in Table 2.1 because unemployed workers were still counted in the labor force.¹⁰

World War II (1941 to 1945 for the United States), which closely followed the Great Depression, marked a turning point in the distribution of economic roles between women and men, although it did not necessarily cause the massive changes that were to follow. Similar to World War I, World War II created what was expected to be a temporary high demand for female labor. Women were attracted to war-related industries by a "Rosie the Riveter" recruitment campaign appealing to their patriotism, and they were given access to the more skilled, higher-paying jobs usually held by men. Rosie was a fictional character created for the campaign, and her image appeared on posters and magazine covers during the war. However, she was typically portrayed as White except for in news photographs; there were no posters of Black Rosies.¹¹

Spurred by the recruitment campaign and war needs, the number of employed women increased by 50% in the U.S. between 1940 and 1945. However, after World War II was won in 1945, the labor force did not quickly "return to normal" as it did after World War I. Instead, a new sense of what is normal emerged.

SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Changes in the economic roles played by women and men in the second half of the 20th century took several forms. The labor force participation rate of women rose steadily from 31% in 1950 to 60% by 2000, with the largest increase in labor force participation seen among non-Hispanic White women. In contrast, the labor force participation rate of men declined from 80% in 1950 to 75% in 2000. Although the gap between men and women remained at 15% in 2000, it had narrowed considerably over the 20th century.

This was the result of a significant change in the composition of the female labor force. In 1900, 6% of married women and 44% of single (never-married) women worked. In 1950, 24% of married women and 51% of single women worked. However, in 2000, 62% of married women and 65% of single women worked. Thus, the gap between the labor force participation rates of married and single women virtually disappeared over the century. In 2000, 53% of the female labor force was married, close to the 59% of the male labor force that was married.¹²

Postwar changes in the female labor force demonstrated increasing disregard for the idea that the woman's proper place was in the home. In 1900, the women most accepted into the workplace were single, making up two-thirds of the female labor force. Employment of single women required the least adjustment to public opinion; the notion that the *mother's* proper place was in the home could still be held as a standard when single women worked. The next group to enter the labor force in large numbers was older married women. Between 1940 and 1960, the proportion of 45- to 64-year-old women who worked went from 20% to 42%. These women were past their peak child-raising years. Their increasing presence in the workplace could be accepted begrudgingly by defenders of the status quo as long as *young* mothers stayed at home. The final group of women to increase its labor force participation consisted of younger, married women with preschool or school-age children. By 2000, 81% of mothers with children between 14 and 17 years old, 78% of those with children between 6 and 13 years old, 74% of those with children between 3 and 5 years old, and 63% of those with children 2 years old or under were in the labor force. The employment of a majority of mothers of children of all ages in 2000 effectively signaled the end of adherence to the belief that women belong at home.¹³

The **educational attainment** of women also changed considerably in the postwar years. In the United States, the proportion of college degrees earned by women increased between 1950 and 2000 from 24% to 57% at the bachelor's level and from 29% to 58% at the master's level. As Table 2.2 indicates, these increases were exhibited among members of the major racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, the proportion of college degrees in business earned by women increased between 1960 and 2000 from only 7% to 50% at the bachelor's level and from only 4% to 40% at the master's level. These trends reflected a major societal shift toward the enhancement of women's

academic credentials as well as an increased commitment of women to managerial and professional careers.

TABLE 2.2 ■ College Degrees, Proportion Earned by Women

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Bachelor's Level								
<i>All disciplines:</i> Total	24	35	43	49	53	57	57	58
White	-	-	-	50	54	57	56	57
Black	-	-	-	60	63	66	66	64
Hispanic	-	-	-	50	56	60	61	61
Asian	-	-	-	46	50	54	55	55
<i>Business:</i> Total	-	7	9	34	47	50	49	46
Master's Level								
<i>All disciplines:</i> Total	29	32	39	49	52	58	60	61
White	-	-	-	51	56	60	62	64
Black	-	-	-	63	64	68	71	70
Hispanic	-	-	-	52	55	60	64	66
Asian	-	-	-	40	43	52	54	58
<i>Business:</i> Total	-	4	4	22	34	40	46	49

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2022). *Digest of education statistics*, computed from Tables 318.10, 322.20, 323.20, and 325.25. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov>.

Note: Dash indicates data not available.

These changes may in part be attributed to the power of “the pill” (female oral contraceptives), regarded by *The Economist* as the most important advance in science and technology in the 20th century. The pill was approved for use by U.S. women in 1960 and was dispensed rapidly first to married women and, after several federal and state court actions, to single women. The pill greatly increased the reliability of contraception and reduced uncertainty about the consequences of sexual activity. Women could invest in a lengthy education without fearing that it would be interrupted by an unplanned pregnancy. By 1964, about a quarter of married women under age 45 were

“on the pill.” Further, because the pill led to the postponing of marriage by most young women regardless of their educational aspirations, single women could delay marriage until completing their initial career preparation without being forced to choose from a reduced pool of eligible bachelors. As a result, the pill facilitated women’s preparation for managerial and professional careers regardless of their marital status.¹⁴

The increased employment and educational attainment of women coincided with a rise in the proportion of **white-collar jobs** in the economy. White-collar jobs are those that do not require manual labor, including managerial jobs, professional jobs (e.g., engineers, teachers, lawyers, computer scientists, and health care practitioners), sales jobs (e.g., sales representatives and proprietors), and administrative support jobs (e.g., administrative assistants and clerical workers). In 1950, 36% of all jobs were white-collar and women held 40% of these jobs. By 2000, over half of all jobs were white-collar and women held more than half of these jobs.¹⁵

The women who entered the U.S. labor force after World War II came increasingly from the non-Hispanic White middle class. The growth in white-collar occupations created jobs that were compatible with middle-class status. Aspirations for a higher standard of living, consumerism, the desire to send children to college, and inflation made it necessary for some middle-class women to work to maintain a middle-class standard of living.

However, traditional attitudes concerning women’s proper place in society persisted. During the 1950s, the mass media promoted an image of family togetherness that defined the mother’s role as central to all domestic activity. According to Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, women were supposedly finding true fulfillment in this way:

Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands. . . . They gloried in their role as women, and wrote proudly on the census blank: “Occupation: housewife.”¹⁶

Women were expected to revel in this role and happily surrender control of and participation in economic and public life to men. According to opinion polls, both women and men accepted such gender roles. Yet the statistics that have been presented show that something else was actually happening in the workplace. As one observer put it, “A visitor from another planet who read the magazines and newspapers of the 1950s would never have guessed that the women portrayed as being engaged exclusively in homemaking activities were also joining the job market in unprecedented numbers.”¹⁷

During this period, women workers were not perceived as crusading to achieve economic equality with men. Instead, their increased economic activity could be interpreted as consistent with their primary role as helpmates to their spouses. Most women who worked were citing economic need as the reason for their employment, even when the family income was solidly in the middle-class range. If women had not

been portrayed, or portrayed themselves, as working temporarily to help meet immediate needs, male resistance to their entry into the labor force might have been greater.

Nonetheless, the contradiction between traditional attitudes and actual behavior could not last, especially when that contradiction became greater each year. What eventually changed was the public perception of traditional gender roles. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a **women's liberation movement** emerged that had a major impact on the attitudes of women and, indirectly, men about their roles. This change was spurred both by the experiences of women in the civil rights movement of the 1960s and by the increasing resentment of middle-class business and professional women toward the barriers that held back their progress. This discontent found an early voice in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, but mere recognition of the limits on women's achievements placed by society's attitudes was not enough. A full-fledged push for legislative and economic action ensued that would bring closer the goal of equality—or at least of equal opportunity—for men and women.¹⁸

The National Organization for Women (NOW), the first avowedly feminist organization since women gained the right to vote, held its inaugural meeting in 1966 with Betty Friedan as the chief organizer. Its statement of purpose expressed concerns about discrimination in employment, education, and the legal system. It also called for a true partnership between women and men to be brought about by equitable sharing of the responsibilities of home and children and their economic support. Women's groups such as NOW were successful in promoting change in many areas. Through lawsuits or the threat of legal action, large corporations were pressured into initiating "affirmative action" programs to increase their hiring and promotion of women. The federal government was pressured into investigating sex discrimination in federally funded contracts and federally sponsored programs and then devising programs to end it. Women's studies courses were added to the curricula at many colleges and universities. Pressure from the women's liberation movement reduced the emphasis on gender stereotypes in children's books, stimulated the opening of day care centers, and contributed to the elimination of sexist language in professional journals and of separate advertising for "women's jobs" and "men's jobs" in newspapers. *Ms.*, a magazine founded in 1972, declared the 1970s as "the decade of women." The women's liberation movement had an impact in many ways, large and small, and a whole generation of women became aware of the possibilities that could be open to them if they did not follow traditional norms.¹⁹

Starting in the 1960s, **equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws** were passed in many countries to restrict sex discrimination as well as other types of discrimination. In the United States, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, or national origin in any employment condition, including hiring, firing, promotion, transfer, compensation, and access to training programs. Title VII was later extended to ban discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or childbirth and to ban sexual harassment. The Equal Pay Act of 1963

made it illegal to pay members of one sex less than the other if they are in equivalent jobs. All organizations with 50 or more employees and federal contracts exceeding \$50,000 per year were required to file affirmative action programs with the federal government detailing the steps they were taking to eliminate discrimination. In addition, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 banned sex discrimination in educational institutions receiving federal funds. Among other benefits, Title IX led to an enormous increase in opportunities for women to participate in college athletics.²⁰

Ironically, the Title VII ban on sex discrimination in the United States was proposed as a last-minute amendment by a civil rights opponent as a strategy to prevent passage of the bill. Opponents felt the male-dominated Congress would be more reluctant to pass the legislation if the ban on sex discrimination was included. Indeed, one representative justified his opposition with the phrase, “*Vive la difference!*” However, women’s rights advocates joined civil rights opponents to pass the amendment and then joined civil rights advocates to pass the entire bill, amendment and all. Thus, Title VII opened the door for significant gains for women in the workplace despite the intent of the representative who offered the amendment.²¹

The women’s movement and EEO laws elicited mixed reactions from men. The men most threatened by these social and legal developments were those most committed to traditional roles in the family, the workplace, and public affairs. They were alarmed because their power in a patriarchal social system was being challenged. Other men were concerned about the impact on their job security and future advancement as more women entered the workplace. These men were inclined to dismiss newly mandated affirmative action programs as “promoting reverse discrimination.” Most men, however, viewed the women’s movement and EEO laws with ambivalence and anxiety. They took these developments seriously, but they did not know what to make of them or how to respond to them.²²

Many women, on the other hand, complained of a backlash against the women’s liberation movement and were frustrated at the incomplete achievement of its goals. One woman characterized feminism as the “Great Experiment That Failed,” with its perpetrators as the casualties. Younger women, however, tended to see such complaints as tales from “the old days when, once upon a time, women had trouble getting into the schools or jobs they now hold.”²³

A **LGBTQ+ civil rights movement** emerged in 1969 and gathered strength in the 1970s after a police raid and ensuing riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. At the time, homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association, state laws against sodomy were prevalent, and police raids on gay bars were common. However, patrons of the Stonewall Inn, most of whom were transgender, fought back against a police raid on June 28, 1969, and riots continued for several days. The LGBTQ+ community was galvanized by the Stonewall riots and activist groups soon formed. On the first anniversary of the riots, gay pride parades took place in several major cities, an annual

tradition that has continued. By the end of the 1970s, both associations had removed homosexuality from their official lists of mental disorders, and sodomy laws had been repealed in many states—policy changes that were attributed to the movement.²⁴

In the last decade of the 20th century, tensions between women and men over public issues and events repeatedly emerged. **Sexual harassment**—the directing of unwelcome sexual attention by one workforce member toward another—became a matter of considerable public discussion due to several highly publicized incidents. For example, female sportswriters experienced rampant sexual harassment and blatant sexism as they entered locker rooms for male sports teams in which there had previously been no female presence. Sexual harassment in the military became recognized as a major problem as revelations emerged of its being experienced by female aviators, Army recruits, and cadets at U.S. military academies training to be future officers. The first woman to complain of sexual harassment in a particular setting was typically subjected to a public smear campaign after reporting the incident.²⁵

In the public arena, issues of sexism and racism were raised when Clarence Thomas, a Black nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court who was eventually confirmed as a justice, was accused by Anita Hill, a Black law professor and former subordinate of Thomas, of sexual harassment. In televised hearings, Hill's graphic charges were dramatically aired and vehemently denied by Thomas, who claimed he was a victim of racism. Battle lines were drawn over the merits of Hill's charges. Polls suggested that White women, who were less sensitive to racism, were most favorable to Hill, whereas Black women, who were more sensitive to racism, were most favorable to Thomas. Publicity from the Thomas–Hill hearings increased public sensitivity to the issue of sexual harassment. In the first half of the next year, sexual harassment charges filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission were up by more than 50% over the same period the year before.²⁶

Workplace romance—the sharing of welcome sexual attention by two workforce members—also became a public issue after it became known that U.S. President Bill Clinton had engaged in sexual activity with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. Clinton was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives but was not convicted of the impeachment charges by the U.S. Senate, which would have forced him to leave office. Clinton claimed that the investigation of the affair infringed on his private life. However, the fact that the incidents occurred on White House premises and placed a burden on his office staff made it a very public affair.²⁷

Even the merits of flirting by professional women in the workplace were hotly debated. After *The Wall Street Journal* reported that younger women were more inclined to “let their femininity show” and use it to get ahead professionally than their mothers had been, readers took sides. A female reader complained that giving the impression that young women were using their sexual appeal to compete in the workplace perpetuated the stereotype of women as sex objects and harmed women perceived as less attractive who were working hard to get ahead based on merit. A male reader

complained that if he risked a sexual harassment complaint by flaunting his sexuality in the office, professional women should not be allowed to flaunt their feminine lures either. The only people who seemed to be happy about the situation were the women who enjoyed and benefited from flirting and the men who welcomed their attention.²⁸

In summary, our review of key events and trends in the 20th century and before suggests that (1) changes in reproductive technology, a women's liberation movement, and civil rights laws contributed to women's enhanced educational attainment and workplace status; (2) social concerns emerged about issues such as sexual harassment and workplace romance that had received little attention before the increased status of women in the workplace; and (3) the economic roles played by women and men became more similar over time, especially during the 20th century's second half. Sex differences in U.S. labor force participation, educational attainment, employment in white-collar occupations, and the marital status of labor force participants all decreased dramatically over the course of the century.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Corporations have displayed increased concern in the 21st century about sexual harassment and workplace romance in their midst, including their executive suites. Many chief executive officers (CEOs) of major corporations have lost their jobs for engaging in one or the other or for fostering an overly sexualized work environment through their actions or inactions. Powerful men below the CEO position in many companies have also lost their jobs for having sexually harassed women in positions of less power. Prominent politicians continue to be called out for inappropriate social sexual behavior, both sexual harassment of and romantic relationships with staff members. Sexual harassment, as well as workplace romance when relationships are consensual but seen as inappropriate by others, remain issues of heightened public concern. Chapter 7 discusses issues associated with social sexual behavior in the workplace in detail.

After allegations that Harvey Weinstein, a movie studio CEO, had engaged in rampant sexual harassment, assault, and rape over three decades became public knowledge in 2017, the #MeToo movement was launched by victims of sexual harassment and resulted in hundreds of thousands of women sharing their experiences. (Weinstein has since been convicted of some of these allegations and is serving prison time at the time of this writing.) As a result of the #MeToo hashtag movement, Twitter became a major platform in the 21st century for sharing experiences of sexual violence in the workplace and raising awareness of the prevalence of the phenomenon.²⁹

Increased attention has been directed in the 21st century toward issues faced by LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and self-described queer) individuals in the workplace and society. The LGBTQ+ civil rights movement has continued to foster positive developments. For example, the United Nations passed its first resolution supporting LGBTQ+ rights. In the United States and many other nations, same-sex

marriage was legalized and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination laws passed. Gender health centers were initiated to offer health services to LGBTQ+ people in particular. Many corporations have adopted policies fostering inclusion of LGBTQ+ employees and tangible supports such as health care benefits for same-sex partners and have seen corresponding benefits in LGBTQ+ employee commitment and engagement. Overall, although not uniformly, acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace has increased during the 21st century.³⁰

Workplaces were affected by protests over the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery (all Black people) by current or former police officers in 2020. The **Black Lives Matter movement**, which arose to address issues of police violence against Black people, has been described as the largest social movement in U.S. history. At the peak of months of protests, half a million Americans protested in over 500 locations on June 6, 2020. The **#SayHerName movement**, which gained strength after Taylor's death, raised issues of the intersection of victims' race and sex in responses to such incidents. It sought to increase awareness of Black women who had been victims of police violence and to address what was seen as their marginalization in the media and the Black Lives Matter movement.³¹

Many companies responded to these social movements by pledging support for Black employees and programs to eradicate racial discrimination. Statements from CEOs denouncing racism and media ads supporting the Black Lives Matter and #SayHerName movements were common. However, companies exhibited varying levels of commitment to making actual changes to reduce racial inequities in their midst. Corporate responses varied from no commitment to no new commitment to token commitment (e.g., social media posts claiming support but no substantive internal changes) to true commitment. For their part, Black employees said that they saw some positive changes in their places of work after the Black Lives Matter protests, but not enough.³²

During the 21st century so far, trends toward gender equality in the workplace and society fostered by social developments have received mixed reviews. On the 50th anniversary of the founding of *Ms.* in 1972, Gloria Steinem, a co-founder of the magazine and prominent figure in the women's liberation movement, said, "I feel proud, and I feel mad as hell. We are still dealing with the same issues." On the 100th anniversary of passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, which guaranteed women the right to vote, about two-thirds of all women and half of all men said that the nation had not gone far enough when it comes to giving women equal rights with men, although most believed that progress had been made. The World Economic Forum, which issues an annual global gender gap report focusing on workplace and societal trends, estimated that it would take 132 years to close the gap entirely. This estimate may be viewed either optimistically ("Hey, we're getting there. It's just a matter of time") or pessimistically ("Yea, right. And if the gap is ever closed, why will it take so long?").³³

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The **COVID-19 pandemic** led to widespread lockdowns by workplaces and schools starting in 2020 to try to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.³⁴ At one point, about half of the world's population was under some form of lockdown due to the pandemic, having been asked or ordered by their governments to stay at home.³⁵ Simultaneous work and family lockdowns had different but overlapping implications for employees.

Work lockdowns that were imposed on employees not deemed as “essential workers” led to a considerable increase in virtual work. During a two-week period in March 2020, because of work lockdowns, the proportion of the U.S. labor force that was working from home increased from 33% to 61%. Being conducted in a predominantly virtual manner changes the nature of work in fundamental ways. During the pandemic, an increased level in virtual work influenced the nature of gender issues in mixed-sex teams, issues that are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.³⁶

Female employees who were not essential workers were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Women were highly represented in some of the industries that were hit hardest by the pandemic, including travel, childcare, personal care and services, and education. In contrast, men were more likely to be employed in jobs that were preserved during the pandemic by a shift to virtual work. As a result, women suffered more from pandemic-related job losses than men.³⁷

Further, the majority of essential workers in the U.S. were women, with one-third of all jobs held by women designated as essential. Female-dominated essential jobs included health care (e.g., nurses and nursing assistants, respiratory therapists), social work (e.g., home health aides checking on older clients), and critical retail jobs (e.g., pharmacists and pharmacy aides, cashiers at grocery stores). Although other types of essential jobs were male-dominated (e.g., transportation, handling of hazardous materials), the numbers of essential workers in male-dominated jobs were smaller than in female-dominated jobs.³⁸

Essential workers faced the risk that ill health derived from their work role would affect their ability to maintain family finances and spill over into the health of family members. For example, a registered nurse in the coronavirus ward of a local hospital had the following experience: In caring for patients with the coronavirus, she contracted the virus herself, stayed home to receive medical attention for it while fearing that she would pass it along to her husband, and then went back to work while still experiencing symptoms because she was so concerned about her family's income. Her holding a black belt in martial arts did not protect her from this kind of risk at all.

Family lockdowns resulted in increased family responsibilities for parents of school-age children as schools closed and shifted to online instruction. Homeschooling or assisting children with distance learning became the primary mode of childhood education. Theoretically, having both parents working at home during a family lockdown provided the opportunity for an approximately equal division of household labor in dual-career, heterosexual households. This was not exactly the case. The gendered

division of unpaid domestic labor roles, with women performing or being responsible for most of the housework, has been an enduring feature of such households over time, even when women earn more than their male partners. This division continued during the pandemic, with women tending to spend more time on homeschooling their children while simultaneously working virtually than their husbands, who might pitch in on occasion. However, some less gendered, egalitarian strategies for dual-career couples' coping with family lockdowns were exhibited during the pandemic.³⁹

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic was, as one observer put it, “a disaster for feminism.” Traditional gender role expectations as described in Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* appeared to be reinforced during the pandemic. Contrary to the dream that Friedan said that married women were supposed to have in the 1950s (“Occupation: housewife”), most working mothers were not happy about and were extremely stressed out by simultaneous work and family lockdowns in response to the pandemic.⁴⁰

ECONOMIC ROLES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the 21st century so far (i.e., since 2000) as Table 2.1 indicates, the proportion of men in the labor force decreased from 75% to 68%, and the proportion of women in the labor force decreased from 60% to 57%. As a result, the sex difference in labor force participation rates decreased from 15% to 11%. However, the proportion of labor force participants who are female has held steady since 2000 at 47%. The COVID-19 pandemic did not appear to affect labor force participation rates, as unemployed workers were still regarded as being in the labor force.

Also since 2000, as Table 2.2 indicates, although the proportion of bachelor’s degrees earned by women essentially held steady (57% vs. 58%), the proportion of master’s degrees earned by women increased from 58% to 61%. Further, although the proportion of bachelor’s degrees in business earned by women decreased from 50% to 46%, retreating from gender equality and reversing direction from the late 20th century trend, the proportion of master’s degrees in business earned by women rose from 40% to 49%, approaching gender equality and continuing the late 20th century trend. Thus, trends in women’s preparation for managerial and professional roles as exhibited by their earning college degrees, especially in business, have differed at the bachelor’s versus master’s levels in the 21st century so far.

There are sex differences in the employment status of members of different racial and ethnic groups. First, a note on the terminology used to represent race and ethnicity in this book: The terms *White*, *Black*, and *Asian* are used to designate racial groups and *Hispanic* to designate an ethnic group, because these are the terms most frequently used in U.S. government reports and employment statistics; employment statistics for other racial and ethnic groups are not reported in this chapter. However, terms such as *Caucasian*, *African American*, *Pacific Islander*, and *Latino/Latina/Latinx* might be used

just as well. Also, note that U.S. employment statistics are not reported for LGBTQ+ individuals.

The three largest racial groups in the U.S. labor force according to government data are Whites (77%), Blacks (12%), and Asians (7%); other racial groups (e.g., Native Americans) represent a combined total of about 4% of the labor force. Hispanics represent the largest ethnic group in the labor force tracked in government data (18%). Hispanics as an ethnic group may be classified according to race; 89% of Hispanics in the labor force are classified as White, 5% as Black, and 1% as Asian. For purposes of comparison, we will examine the employment status of White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic men and women.⁴¹

However, each of these groups may be divided into multiple subgroups. For example, Asians in the U.S. labor force are 25% Indian, 22% Chinese, 14% Filipino, 9% Vietnamese, 8% Korean, 5% Japanese, and 17% other (e.g., Pakistani, Cambodian, etc.), including those who belong to two or more Asian groups. Hispanics in the labor force are 60% Mexican, 11% Central American, 9% Puerto Rican, 8% South American, 4% Cuban, 4% Dominican, and 4% other; some of these categories (e.g., Central American, South American) may be further divided into individuals from different nations. U.S. employment statistics do not recognize subdivisions of the major racial and ethnic groups. Further, these statistics do not acknowledge that many labor force participants consider themselves **multiracial**.⁴²

Table 2.3 reports the percentage of women and men in the labor force for each of the four examined racial and ethnic groups. The sex difference in labor force participation rates favoring men varies considerably across racial and ethnic groups, ranging from 5% for Blacks to 19% for Hispanics. As we shall see, there are other significant differences in the employment status of women and men as well as members of different racial and ethnic groups.

Racial/Ethnic Group	Percentage in the U.S. Labor Force		
	Women	Men	Difference
White	55	68	13
Black	59	64	5
Asian	57	72	15
Hispanic	56	75	19

Sources: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey*, Tables 3 and 4. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm>

THE SEX SEGREGATION OF OCCUPATIONS

If the workplace were completely integrated with respect to sex, the percentages of the male and female labor force in each occupation would be equal. For example, if 5% of all males were engineers, 5% of all females would be engineers, and the same would hold true for all occupations. Occupations may be characterized as segregated with respect to sex when females and males are *not* similarly distributed across occupations. The level of **sex segregation of occupations** has dropped in most countries since the 1970s, primarily due to the increased employment of women in male-dominated occupations. However, it has been stable during the 21st century so far and remains very high. In fact, the sex segregation of occupations is one of the most enduring features of the global economy.⁴³

The nature of sex segregation in the U.S. workplace may be understood best by examining the employment of women and men in major occupational categories. As Table 2.4 indicates, women hold 47% of all jobs in the labor force. Occupations are classified as male-intensive, female-intensive, or sex-neutral based on the proportion of women in the occupation. **Male-intensive occupations** are defined as those in which one-third (33%) or less of the workforce is female. **Female-intensive occupations** are defined as those in which two-thirds (67%) or more of the workforce is female. **Sex-neutral occupations** consist of occupations in which women hold more than one-third and less than two-thirds of the jobs (34% to 66%).

Taking into account the size of the labor force in these occupations, only 11.4% of women work in male-intensive occupations, and only 14.4% of men work in female-intensive occupations. In contrast, 45.7% of all men work in male-intensive occupations, and 47.5% of all women work in female-intensive occupations. Overall, slightly less than half of the labor force works in occupations numerically dominated by members of their own sex, whereas less than 15% of the labor force works in occupations numerically dominated by members of a different sex.⁴⁴ The experiences of workers may differ substantially depending on whether they are employed in occupations that are sex-neutral, dominated by members of their own sex, or dominated by members of a different sex.

Details about the level of sex segregation in specific occupations are masked by the fact that employment statistics for about 800 different occupations are combined into 22 major occupational groups in the U.S. government data reported in Table 2.4. For example, although production occupations are classified as male-intensive overall (28.3% female), they include female-intensive occupations such as sewing machine operators (71.1% female) as well as male-intensive occupations such as machinists (3.4% female). Also, although healthcare practitioner and technical occupations are classified as female-intensive overall (74.3% female), they include male-intensive occupations such as chiropractors (24.2% female) as well as female-intensive occupations such as dental hygienists (95.1% female); note the large difference in the proportion of women for two types of jobs in the same occupation. Finally, although

TABLE 2.4 ■ Employment of Women and Men in Occupations

Occupation	Percentage of Female Employees	Occupation Type
1. Management	40.9	
2. Business and financial operations	54.8	
3. Computer and mathematics	26.2	M
4. Architecture and engineering	17.4	M
5. Life, physical, and social sciences	47.4	
6. Community and social services	67.5	F
7. Legal	53.5	
8. Education, training, and library	73.7	F
9. Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	50.0	
10. Healthcare practitioner and technical	74.3	F
11. Healthcare support	85.1	F
12. Protective services	23.3	M
13. Food preparation and serving	54.6	
14. Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	41.7	
15. Personal care and services	78.7	F
16. Sales	49.8	
17. Office and administrative support	72.2	F
18. Farming, fishing, and forestry	24.2	M
19. Construction and extraction	3.9	M
20. Installation, maintenance, and repair	4.3	M
21. Production	28.3	M
22. Transportation and material moving	21.6	M
TOTAL	47.0	

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey*, Table 11. Retrieved November 4, 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps>.

Note: Occupation type equals M for a male-intensive occupation (33% female employees or less) and F for a female-intensive occupation (67% female employees or more); no symbol indicates a sex-neutral occupation (between 34% and 66% female employees). The table includes both full-time and part-time employees.

food preparation and serving occupations are classified as sex-neutral overall (54.6% female), they include male-intensive occupations involved in food preparation such as chefs and head cooks (22.8% female) and female-intensive occupations involved in food serving such as wait staff (68.2% female). We shall discuss sex differences in the status of food servers in Chapter 4.⁴⁵

Management occupations, classified as sex-neutral in Table 2.4 (40.9% female), deserve special attention because they include workers with power and authority over others. These occupations include managers (also called *supervisors*) who work in different types of functions (e.g., marketing, finance, public relations, human resources, purchasing, etc.) as well as different types of industries (e.g., lodging, funeral services, medical, construction). As for other occupational groups, the combining of management occupations into one occupational group masks sex segregation within specific types of managerial jobs. For example, some managerial jobs such as computer and information systems managers (26.7% female) are male-intensive, whereas other managerial jobs such as human resources managers are female-intensive (80.8% female). However, although management occupations as a whole have shifted over time from once being male-intensive to now being sex-neutral in composition, the *top* ranks of management occupations remain male-intensive.⁴⁶

The **racial and ethnic segregation of occupations** also warrants attention. If the U.S. workplace was completely integrated with regard to race and ethnicity, the percentage of the Black labor force in every occupation would be about 12%, the percentage of the Asian labor force would be about 7%, and the percentage of the Hispanic labor force would be about 18%. Table 2.5 displays the percentage of Black, Asian, and Hispanic employees in each of the major occupational groups; it does not include percentages for White employees because these percentages are overwhelmingly larger than those of the other groups. The proportion of Black employees is highest in health-care support (e.g., nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides), protective services, and transportation and material moving occupations. The proportion of Asian employees is highest in computer and mathematics; life, physical, and social sciences; and architecture and engineering occupations. The proportion of Hispanic employees is highest in farming, fishing, and forestry; construction and extraction; and building and grounds cleaning and maintenance. Overall, occupations are segregated with regard to race and ethnicity as well as sex and the intersection of sex with race and ethnicity.⁴⁷

THE SEX GAP IN EARNINGS

Not only do women and men tend to work in different occupations, but they also differ in earnings. The ratio of female-to-male earnings (F/M ratio) for full-time U.S. employees across all occupations is 83%.⁴⁸ Although this ratio has risen since the 1970s, when it was about 60%, the **sex gap in earnings** is another enduring feature of the global economy.⁴⁹

TABLE 2.5 ■ Employment of Members of Racial and Ethnic Groups in Occupations

Occupation	Percentage of Employees		
	Black	Asian	Hispanic
1. Management	8.6	6.5	11.1
2. Business and financial operations	10.5	8.6	10.3
3. Computer and mathematics	8.5	23.3	8.3
4. Architecture and engineering	5.8	14.6	9.7
5. Life, physical, and social sciences	7.4	15.2	8.3
6. Community and social services	19.7	3.8	12.5
7. Legal	8.1	4.8	10.4
8. Education, training, and library	9.9	5.6	10.8
9. Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	8.2	5.7	11.1
10. Healthcare practitioner and technical	12.0	9.5	9.4
11. Healthcare support	24.5	6.8	20.9
12. Protective services	20.3	2.7	14.9
13. Food preparation and serving	13.4	6.3	27.8
14. Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	14.2	3.4	38.3
15. Personal care and services	12.5	10.1	18.0
16. Sales	11.2	5.4	16.7
17. Office and administrative support	15.0	4.8	17.7
18. Farming, fishing, and forestry	4.4	2.3	43.9
19. Construction and extraction	7.1	1.7	38.9
20. Installation, maintenance, and repair	8.3	3.3	22.0
21. Production	13.3	5.5	24.0
22. Transportation and material moving	20.1	4.2	23.6
TOTAL	12.3	6.6	18.0

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey*, Table 11. Retrieved November 4, 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps>.

Note: The table includes both full-time and part-time employees.

The sex gap in earnings exists within each of the major racial and ethnic groups.⁵⁰ It also exists within all of the 22 major occupational groups reported in Table 2.4, including male-intensive, female-intensive, and sex-neutral occupations. To cite a few examples for specific occupations within the major occupational groups, the F/M ratio for full-time workers is 92% for civil engineers, 77% for lawyers, 90% for college and university teachers, 87% for elementary and middle school teachers, 89% for registered nurses, 87% for waiters and waitresses, 83% for janitors and building cleaners, 85% for customer service representatives, and 80% for administrative assistants and secretaries. In management occupations, the F/M ratio is 77% for managers overall and 70% for CEOs. In rare examples of occupations in which women earn more than men, the F/M ratio is 107% for business compliance officers, 106% for graphic designers, and 104% for pharmacists.

The wages earned in female-intensive occupations are typically lower than those earned in male-intensive occupations. The reduction in the earnings gap since the 1970s has been primarily due to the increased employment and retention of women in occupations that were previously male-intensive (e.g., management and law) or are still male-intensive (e.g., architecture and engineering). When women enter a male-intensive occupation, they are likely to remain in it to keep the higher pay. In contrast, when men enter a female-intensive occupation, they are more likely to be “stopgappers” and leave soon after their entry to avoid the lower pay. However, women’s entering an occupation in greater numbers tends to suppress wages in the occupation itself, especially for occupations that are highly paid and male-intensive, such that these women find themselves “moving up the down staircase.”⁵¹

Among women, there is a wage gap between mothers and women without children. A **motherhood penalty** in earnings exists for women at all pay and skill levels. This penalty is greatest in women’s starting salaries and in their salaries when they resume paid employment after bearing and raising a child. In contrast, among men, there is no fatherhood penalty in earnings. In fact, fathers tend to be offered higher starting salaries than men without children, suggesting the presence of a **fatherhood bonus** in earnings.⁵²

The sex gap in earnings does not diminish with educational attainment and actually becomes larger for the more highly educated. Although education has a strong positive effect on earnings for both women and men, it yields greater economic benefits for men. The earnings gap exists at every educational level—for workers with less than a high school education, a high school diploma, a bachelor’s degree, and even an advanced graduate degree. For college graduates, the sex gap in earnings is influenced by the choice of major. Because women major more than men in fields that prepare graduates for female-intensive occupations and less than men in fields that prepare graduates for male-intensive occupations, we can see that the sex gap in future earnings originates before college students even interview for jobs. Sex differences in preemployment experiences are examined further in Chapter 3.⁵³

The sex gap in earnings tends to increase with age, providing an example of intersectionality between two primary dimensions of diversity—sex and age—in accounting for individuals' wages in ways in which adding separate effects of sex and age would not explain. For example, a study of Hollywood movie stars (defined as actors and actresses who have played a leading role in a movie) found that actresses' salaries per movie increased until age 34 and then decreased rapidly, whereas actors' salaries per movie increased until age 51 and then remained at about the same level. In the study, the authors noted, "Men's well-worn faces are thought to convey maturity, character, and experience. A woman's face, on the other hand, is valued for appearing young." In an interview, Tim Judge, one of the study's authors, said, "This is a microcosm of what happens in society. . . . We are such an appearance-based society."⁵⁴

The sex gap in earnings is also influenced by weight, providing another example of intersectionality between sex and a personal characteristic. The U.S. has been described as "one of the most weight-conscious societies in the world while simultaneously being one of the most obese." In other words, it is an appearance-based society on the basis of weight (even though many of its citizens are overweight) as well as age. A study using health data from the same individuals over a 25-year period found a sex difference in the effect of weight on earnings: Women were penalized in earnings for gaining weight, especially if they started with being thin, whereas men were rewarded in earnings for gaining weight until they reached the point of obesity. Overall, the sex gap in earnings appears to be highest for individuals who are at high weight levels relative to the average member of their own sex.⁵⁵

Thus, there is a "cost of being female" (especially for mothers) that prevails within occupations as well as across occupations, racial and ethnic groups, and educational levels. The magnitude of the cost of being female is influenced by other factors such as age and weight. The gap between male and female earnings is a long-standing attribute of the global economy, and it is not likely that this gap will disappear anytime soon.

In conclusion, women and men tend to play different economic roles in the workplace today. Employment and compensation patterns send a powerful message to young people entering the labor force today and to current labor force participants. The message is that although all occupations are theoretically open to all individuals, (1) some occupations are more appropriate for members of one sex than other occupations, (2) the lower-paying occupations are more appropriate for women, (3) the higher-paying occupations are more appropriate for men, (4) work in male-intensive occupations is worth more than work in female-intensive occupations, and (5) work performed by men is worth more than equivalent work performed by women.

LOOKING FORWARD

Traditional gender roles have less to do with present-day economic realities than at any previous time. The changes experienced by women in the labor force through the 20th century were striking. Women entering male-intensive organizations went from being the only woman holding a particular job to being a member of a small group of women in the midst of a larger group of men in the job, sometimes to being a member of the majority group and increasingly more often to being in charge. The changes experienced by men during this time were less dramatic. However, men were required to adapt to the presence of more women as their peers, superiors, and subordinates. Since the 20th century, changes experienced by women and men in the workplace appear to have stalled.

As a result, significant differences between the economic roles played by women and men remain firmly in place. Men continue to hold **most top management** positions in organizations. Even when organizations consist **predominantly of female employees**, the leaders are typically male. The gap between **male and female wages** persists. Among full-time workers, women consistently earn **lower wages than** men. Even with the same job in the same occupation, women's **average earnings are** typically lower than those of men. The highest-paid occupations are those with **predominantly male workers**.

Even though work and its rewards **are not distributed** equally between women and men, traditional gender roles **are no longer appropriate** guidelines for workplace behavior. However, new standards of behavior **have not replaced** the old standards. Whether consciously or unconsciously, **people often** are influenced by their own sex and others' sex in their work behavior.

What *does* it mean to be a woman, a man, or an LGBTQ+ person in today's workplace? How *should* people take into account their own sex and others' sex in their workplace interactions, if at all? Widely accepted answers to these questions, promoting either a **unisex standard** of behavior or separate sex-based standards of behavior, have not emerged.

Due to the substantial increase in women's labor force participation rate in the second half of the 20th century (from 31% to 60%; see Table 2.1) and the sustained proportion of labor force participants who are female in the 21st century so far (47%; see Table 2.4), more workplace interactions are occurring between women and men than in earlier times. One of the few advantages of adhering to traditional gender roles was that men and women knew how they were expected to treat each other. That advantage is gone. Instead, in today's workplace, different-sex individuals need to develop and act on their own norms for how to work together effectively.

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