

8. Gender, Age, and Health

Objectives

- Learn about gender and society
- Understand age and society
- Examine health and society

Vocabulary

ageism	death rate	hormones	sexism
baby boom generation	feminism	infant mortality rate	stereotypes
birth rate	gender	life expectancy	
chromosomes	gender roles	matrilineal societies	

Background

Society's attitudes toward gender, age, and health affect all students personally. Information about these topics can equip students to approach these issues more intelligently. Students begin the chapter by learning about gender in society. They find out that masculine and feminine roles are often societal and learned by socialization. Though roles vary among societies, historically men have held more prestigious roles and women the more domestic roles. They then examine the issue of whether these roles are determined more by society, biology, or both.

Students then learn about socialization and gender roles that can promote some stereotypes currently held in the U.S. They examine roots of gender role inequalities, which began in a more equal hunting and gathering society before evolving into agricultural and industrial societies that lowered the status of females.

The chapter also looks at how variations in the U.S. economy have brought changing roles for women in the workplace. Examples include women working to support the war effort during World War II and the economic expansion in the 1980s. Students next learn about sexism and feminism.

Students go on to study the change and conflicts that arose in the pursuit of equal opportunity for women. Examples include the Suffrage Movement, ERA (Equal Rights Amendment), marriage, women in the workplace, and women in politics.

Students next study the role of age in society, including birth and death rates and life expectancy. They learn about population patterns, age distribution, the global aging crisis, and the graying of America. They also examine U.S. ageism and age-based inequality.

Finally, students look at health issues in society, including disease control, health care access, the rights of the disabled, and health care industry issues such as costs, insurance, and inequality.

Further Resources

Binstock, Robert H. and Linda George, eds.

Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences. New York: Academic Press, 1990.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

For Discussion

Review

1. Describe the three examples of contemporary U.S. stereotypes.
2. Name and define the three main population pattern age groups.
3. Discuss the three main social characteristics of the elderly subculture.
4. What reforms have been suggested in response to health care's high costs and inequality?

Critical Thinking

1. Discuss your feelings about men being the "recorders and historians" who often haven't valued women's activities.

2. Would you say that the way you behave is more influenced by biological differences or social influences? Support your answer and provide examples.
3. How does sexism against women become "self-perpetuating?" Have you (male or female) ever been a victim of sexism? Explain.
4. American business and entertainment have created a culture that implies that it is "cool" to be young. How have American views on the aging have changed (box on page 154)? How would you want to be viewed when you are considered "old"?
5. In what ways can the lack of low cost or national, government-funded health care lead to more advanced diseases and more expensive treatments for patients? What do you think should be done?

Activities

1. Stereotypes

Divide students by gender into two main groups. Ask one male and one female to role-play the opposite gender in situations that could include shopping, sports, television, arguments, hygiene, affection and more. Afterward, discuss the presence or absence of gender stereotyping.

2. Interview

Ask students to find and interview a partner of the opposite sex. Develop a common list of questions that highlight the positive and negative aspects of being a male or female in society. Examples include, "What do you like about being a [male/female]?" "Do you think being a [male/female] limits what you can do in society?" "What are your attitudes toward the opposite sex?"

3. Internet: Older Americans

Ask three groups of students to use the Internet to explore websites as if they were older Americans looking for information. Ask one group to search for information on political concerns (limits on Medicare, Medicaid, law changes, discrimination, etc.). A second group might search for social sites (like dating, activities, vacations, etc.). The final group can search for health information (like exercise, eating right, health care, etc.). Have the groups report their findings.

4. Special Sources: Exploring Feminism

Ask students to use the library to research and report on a major feminist figure or event, contemporary or historical. Tell students to focus on the person or event's contribution to improving society as a whole.

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As you read Chapter 10, write an answer to each question below.

1. Look at the chart at the bottom of page 143. What relationships might there be between a society's economic prosperity and its gender power ratio?

2. Trace gender inequalities in society as its economic basis changed from hunting and gathering cultures to industry-based cultures.

3. How might a high birth rate and a low death rate lead to problems for a population?

4. What kinds of problems are associated with HMOs?

5. Health care in the U.S. has been more available to whites than to African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. What impact has this had on those non-white populations?

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Find the best answer for each item. Then circle that answer.

1. What is the belief that one sex is, by nature, superior to the other?
 - a. superiority
 - b. sexism
 - c. Darwinism
 - d. racism
2. What are the cultural, psychological, and social traits associated with a biological sex?
 - a. perspective
 - b. gender
 - c. genealogy
 - d. society
3. What is the term for prejudice and discrimination against people because of their age?
 - a. oldism
 - b. retirement
 - c. grayism
 - d. ageism
4. What are the chemical substances in the body that stimulate or inhibit chemical processes, such as growth?
 - a. hormones
 - b. chromosomes
 - c. enzymes
 - d. stimulators
5. Which of the following is a term for conventional, oversimplified, often exaggerated images?
 - a. phenotypes
 - b. stereotypes
 - c. monochromes
 - d. metronomes
6. What are the threadlike bodies in each cell that determine hereditary characteristics?
 - a. phonemes
 - b. hormones
 - c. genes
 - d. chromosomes
7. Which term means belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes?
 - a. feminism
 - b. fascism
 - c. socialism
 - d. nepotism
8. What is the large number of Americans born between 1946 and 1964 called?
 - a. overpopulation generation
 - b. baby bust
 - c. family generation
 - d. baby boom
9. What are the specific behaviors and attitudes that a society establishes for men and women?
 - a. his and her roles
 - b. gender rates
 - c. social strata
 - d. gender roles
10. Which is the term for groups that base status and inheritance on the female's kinship descent?
 - a. matrilineal society
 - b. mobile society
 - c. feminist community
 - d. gender based society

Name _____

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Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

1. Differentiation between the genders is probably based on _____.
 - a. biology
 - b. society
 - c. mythology
 - d. a and b
2. With identical expectations of sons and daughters, men and women would _____.
 - a. act and dress the same
 - b. be confused by their gender
 - c. merge into one gender
 - d. fight for different expectations
3. Gender expectations for teenage girls may unfairly suggest that girls _____.
 - a. save more money
 - b. don't like sports
 - c. are more intellectual
 - d. buy more clothes and cosmetics
4. The Kung tribe's settlement into a herding, crop growing, and working society _____.
 - a. gave women more status
 - b. gave men more status
 - c. gave both sexes equal status
 - d. none of the above
5. Gender socialization normally takes place in _____ and is supported by _____.
 - a. school, men
 - b. sports, coaches
 - c. the home, the media
 - d. business, bosses
6. Marriage customs often _____.
 - a. reinforce inequality
 - b. raise the status of the father
 - c. require women to stay home
 - d. all of the above
7. In 1999, women made up ____ of the labor force for a total of ____ working women.
 - a. 46 percent, 62 million
 - b. 16 percent, 15 million
 - c. 61 percent, 43 million
 - d. 22 percent, 71 million
8. Working women normally earn about ____ of what men do.
 - a. 100 percent
 - b. 91 percent
 - c. 58 percent
 - d. 76 percent
9. Judging from the year 2000 population pyramids, life expectancy for the young and old is _____ in United States than in Kenya and Mexico.
 - a. higher
 - b. lower
 - c. about the same
 - d. no different
10. _____ are a leading cause of deaths around the world, but we are a long way from controlling this growing danger.
 - a. Industrial accidents
 - b. Infectious diseases
 - c. Non-infectious diseases
 - d. Household accidents

Essay Question

Discuss your view of ageism and the stereotypes that create prejudice against older Americans. What is your personal view of the older people around you and their value to you personally?